Until We Felt

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Additional Tags:	Alternate Universe - Dark, Alpha/Beta/Omega Dynamics, Alpha Hannibal, Omega Will Graham, Not Canon Compliant, Cults, Cult Leader Hannibal, Infiltration, Undercover Will Graham, Dark Agenda, Seriously Dark, Religious Imagery & Symbolism, Religious Content, Roman Catholicism, Lithuanian Paganism, Hybrid Religion, Religious Fanaticism, Baltimore, Will is a Mess, Will Graham Has Nightmares, Will Graham Has PTSD - Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Guilt, Unstable Will, Manipulative Hannibal, Creepy Hannibal, May Contain Inaccuracies, Brainwashing, Past Character Death, Past Violence, canon character death, Character Death Does Not Apply to Hannibal or Will, Graphic Description, Seriously Do Not Underestimate, guilt tripping, Blizzards & Snowstorms, Symbolism, so much symbolism, Church Retreat, supposedly, Geographical Isolation, Jack being Jack, Dubious Ethics, This Case is Questionable at Best as Well, Will Knows, Somewhat, Possessive Behavior, Will is Off Limits, People are Fearful of Hannibal, Power Dynamics, Hannibal is Attracted to Will, Power Imbalance, Not Beta Read, Tumblr Ask Box Fic, Prompt Fic, Other Additional Tags to Be Added, no encephalitis, Triggers, Unreliable Narrator, Additional Warnings In Author's Note, Near Death Experiences, Blood, Hannigram Day 2016, Also I plan on changing the summary, it's just what I had at the time, communion, Blasphemy, Will is Trying, Will is also alpha bait apparently, possible ooc, but it's not intended, its bc its an au far from canon, Will Graham is a Tease, but its for science, Religious Discussion, Bible Quotes, I promise I'm not going overboard, Implied/Referenced Child Abuse, Past Child Abuse, Implied/Referenced Rape/Non-con, none of which relate to the main characters directly, Hannibal Cooks, not much right now tho, Also Will has a dream involving mpreg, Chapter 4 is a personal issue, Not story related, also "ch4" will be deleted and later replaced with actual story related material, Apologies, Chapter 5 is also not writing for the story, But rather a major update for it, This is going to be rewritten, Am on indefinite haitus until my laptop is fixed tho, But altogether this story is gonna be redone entirely, Some updates on the remake ordeal have been added, Please read, Words bolded for TDLR
Language:	English
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Until We Felt

by cloudsarefluffy

Summary

On Tumblr, Anon asked: *prompt: Hannigram dark cult au. Hannibal is a cult leader and will is sent in by Jack to gather evidence on Hannibal. Will is as unstable as he is in the show so it's very easy for Hannibal to manipulate him. Lots of religious comparisons and contrasts bc Hannibal views himself as god and will is his fave follower. Id love it if u got BDSM in it too like a punishment or exercise, and it's a d/s relationship. Abo and mpreg too plz? I love u so much thx*

~~He pulls the blanket over Will's shoulder, leaving the omega to grab at it with a shaky hand as he tries to warm himself. His hand brushes against Will's, just a little bit electrifying as it passes. Will tries not to react to it, instead opting to bundle up as the stranger looms over him. It's then that the thick scent of the man washes over Will— a thick musk, refined— *alpha.*~~

Chapter 5 is important, as it explains why this story is going to be rewritten entirely.

My computer has been fixed, but there were and are a few other issues with writing this at the moment. My sincerest of apologies.

Updated on: 11/16/17

Notes

So, I accidentally posted this once before this. It was a mistake on my part, and also a tad bit of too much of expectation as well. I created the draft for this some time back, thinking I could have it written and ready to go, and there was a glitch. Instead of saving it as a draft as it had before after I edited some tags, AO3 ended up posting it instead. So yes— it was a bit of a flub on my end, and I decided to delete it. I was going to write it for my upload day — basically when I'm going to fill all my prompts in at once — but that didn't exactly happen...

Because, in light of finding out about the first celebration of Hannigram Day — which is the 22nd of August as it was the airing of the episode "The Number of the Beast is 666" and was the episode in which Bedelia confirmed for us and Will that Hannibal loved Will, and that Will more than likely felt the same way about Hannibal but had not come to terms or recognized that he did — I decided this fic would be perfect to submit for it. I wanted to be a part of Hannigram Day, because I love this ship, and I'm honestly so in love with every aspect about Hannibal itself (Hugh, I also enjoy that you read fan fiction and more than likely

have an AO3 account, like that makes me life worth living). So, I decided to upload this as my addition to the party. (:

Now, it's a work in progress, but I did find out about this on the 21st, so I literally had less than 24 hours, so please cut me some slack, haha.

Anyways, there's a few things I thought I'd clarify:
1) This story is dark and extremely violent. There are things in this fic that I have planned that will definitely trigger or bother someone, and I mean that literally. This fic is not going to be vanilla whatsoever, and it is undoubtedly graphic. I have tagged this appropriately. Please heed the warnings before you delve into this.

2) Due to the nature of this prompt and what it requests, you can figure that the relationship Will and Hannibal will have is going to be unhealthy in multitudes of ways. Hannibal is manipulative, conniving, and he desires Will and do whatever he deems is needed to reach that end goal. Will on the other hand, is mentally unsound as he is in the show sans the encephalitis. He is dealing with past demons, and is suffering from PTSD throughout all of this fic. Because of his guilt and instability, he will fall victim to Hannibal's manipulations and brainwashing, and will be eventually swayed despite his initial resilience. Because of this, I am tagging Will to be an unreliable narrator ahead of time, and will appropriately tag his relationship with Hannibal as it progresses along.

3) There is a lot of religious conflict in this fic, as well as symbolism and imagery. This may include inaccuracies, but intends no offense. This is merely a work of fiction, and I mean no harm. However, due to the nature of the prompt, this is what Hannibal's cult practices, and I will go ahead and warn you that some images portrayed in this will be graphic and unsettling, but is also in no way meant to be a representation of either religion mentioned or tagged.

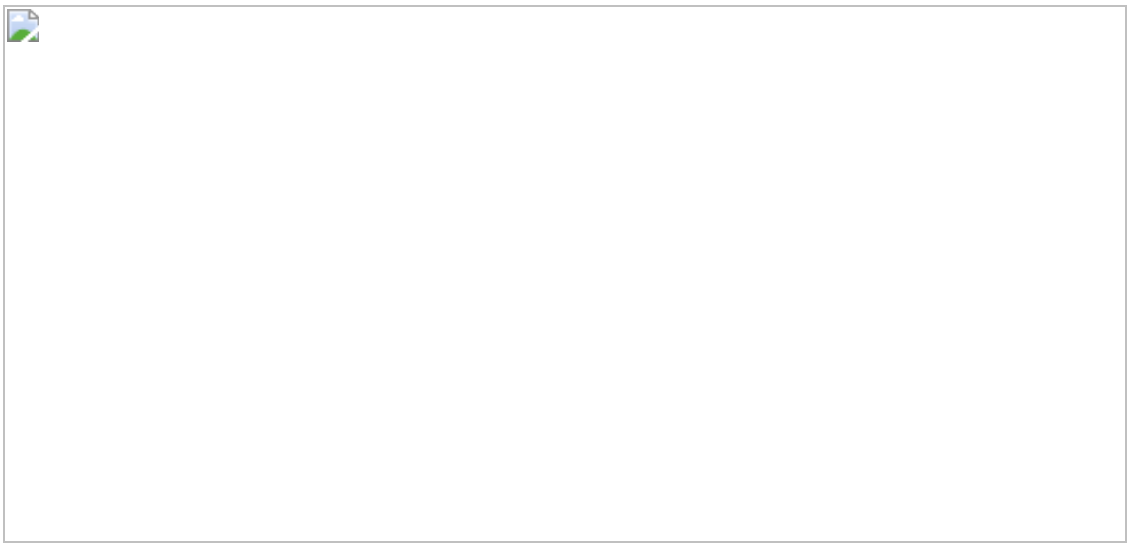
Also, I want to clarify a couple of things within the plot/story itself:
— This story line takes place in about 22 days (sans the small bits of Will arriving, and the epilogue I plan to include at the end), and is based in 2015 when "The Number of the Beast is 666" aired.
— This fic takes place a little ways away from Baltimore, Maryland.
— The church that is mentioned is also a real church in Baltimore.
— Hannibal has none of the ties to Jack or the bureau as he does in the show. Will, however, does.
— Hannibal has a doctorate, but does not necessarily practice in psychology. At least, the moral kind he doesn't.
— I have re-purposed some of the characters in the show for this fic. You may recognize them from throughout the first season of the show; however, their roles have obviously changed.
— Will does not have encephalitis. He is still unstable and mentally struggling as he was, and still acquires his ability of empathy.
— The cycle of the moon is important.

Now, I don't want to spoil too much, but expect information to be provided in the author's notes, so please read them so you can get an idea of what you're getting into. Additional links can be found in the bottom author's note, as well as a peak into the next chapter!

Thank you, and enjoy!~

See the end of the work for more notes

Arrival and Day One



Infallibility (n): the quality of being infallible; the inability to be wrong; (in the Roman Catholic Church) the doctrine that in specified circumstances, the pope is incapable of error in pronouncing dogma.

-X-

The road stretches on, its extent slipping into darkness once the illumination of the SUV's headlights cannot reach any further. The speed at which the car is going blurs the small flurries of snow and street markings, making the latter a near continuous line that reflects so harshly, Will is sure its path has burned itself into his retinas.

Jack is silent beside him, his grip taught on the steering wheel. He's been in somewhat of a pensive silence since he and Will left Quantico some time ago. Will's guessing it's because the beta is weighing the situation right now, more than likely pondering whether or not the decision to assign Will to his current case was truly suitable.

In any other circumstances, Will might find himself considering the same thing. But now, after all that's happened — after what he did— . . . Will can't find it in himself to necessarily disagree with what his and Jack's superiors concluded.

Jack, however, must be discerning otherwise.

"Will," he speaks, his voice loud in the previously quiet cabin of the car, "I— I just want you to know that none of this is exactly final. You could say no and call off this entire operation if you feel a single bit of doubt about it. No one would judge you for it."

Will sighs, turning his gaze away from the street before him to the beta that is softly illuminated by the ghostly green glow of the dashboard, “They’re already judging me, Jack. The reason I’ve been assigned to this case is because I need to redeem myself. I’ve already been walking on a thin line to begin with, and with— with what happened, I’m sure I’m not making my situation any easier… This is essentially the last chance I can prove I’m worth something to the bureau, and that I’m not a liability.”

“Will, I don’t think this isn’t a last chance. It’s a punishment.”

“Then don’t I deserve it?” Will argues, his tone a little frustrated, “How many agents do you know that have messed up like me? Tell me, how many?”

Jack hushes, his lips pursed.

“My point exactly, Jack. I— I need to follow through on this if I want anything to do with the bureau. I have to make up for what I’ve done, and this is apparently the only way to do that.”

The beta glares at the road, looking no happier than he was when he began the conversation, “They’re sending you into the midst of a cult, Will. Don’t you think, for all of the mental instability you’ve had over the years, that it isn’t questionable? What about your status an omega? Doesn’t that also make you a little hesitant to jump headfirst into the fray?”

“I do wish that some circumstances were different, but there’s not much I can do…” Will sighs, his voice settling into a murmur, “You told me when I thought about quitting that there’s more to this job than what happens to me… There are— there are other people. Innocent people. People who don’t deserve what happens to them, and the people who end up losing their family or friends in cruel ways...” the omega watches as Jack peeks at him from the corner of his eye, “But you also told me there are monsters out there, Jack, and that I’m one of the few people who could stop them from hurting any more of those people. If I manage to stay— if I can prove myself, I can make a difference in the end… Isn’t that what you told me was the most important part of the job?”

Jack looks crossed, like now he’s not sure exactly what to think. Will knows that the beta is more than likely unappreciative of the use of his own words against him, but Will had to make his point and intentions clear.

“I just don’t want this to end up going sideways,” Jack grumbles, “This is a serious situation, and I don’t want anyone else getting hurt in the process. Especially you, Will.”

“I appreciate your concerns, Jack, but truthfully, I don’t have much say even if I wanted to back out…”

That makes Jack scowl even harder, “I suppose you’re right…”

“Perks of working for the government.”

Jack snorts at that, but starts to slow the car down. They must be at the drop off point.

Eventually the SUV brakes to a halt, and Will takes a deep breath as he grabs his bag and begins to open the passenger side door. However, before he can exit, Jack grips onto his arm, stopping the omega.

“Will,” Jack’s face scrunches for a moment, a single second and uncertainty expressing itself through his features, “are you absolutely sure that you’re okay with following through with this?”

“Jack, I told you, this is my last chance, and I’m not going to let my fear get the best of me again,” Will looks towards the darkened expanse of woods spread before him, and he wonders what horrors lie waiting, “If— if something happens—“

“*Will—“*

“—if something happens, promise me that if she wakes up, you’ll tell her I’m sorry,” Will whispers, and before it gets to be too much for him, he breaks eye contact with the beta and straightens the strap of his bag over his shoulder.

Jack is wordless for a moment until he gathers himself, “Of course…”

“Thank you,” the omega breathes in deeply, the mountainous air frigid in his lungs, “See you in a few months or so, yeah?”

“I’ll be hoping for nothing else,” the agent sighs, and Will shuts the door.

He waits until the SUV and Jack are gone to start heading into the woods.

Truthfully, Will has never been scared of the dark, but rather what’s in it. Especially now, with the knowledge of what awaits for him out here— or, in some sense, *who*.

His feet are somewhat unsteady as they sink into the collected snow, the only guidance he has being the small flashlight supplied to him. The forest around him is quiet— quieter than the car ride with Jack had been, and it unsettles Will to a degree, since his only apparent company is the misty clouds from his breaths and the blinding half of the first quarter of the moon above.

The trees loom over Will as he continues on, time seemingly nonexistent as the omega trudges on through the slowly, but surely, thickening snow. His limbs after a while start to feel as though they’re were beginning to freeze completely, his fingers and toes feeling like an icy static, despite his shoes and gloves offering some amount of protection from the cold. His poor face is already numbed, a suppressed sting pulsing and burning throughout his exposed skin as the wind and flurries of snow overwhelm Will.

Maybe he’ll freeze to death before he can even find what he’s looking for… Now won’t that be tragic?

Will soon grows tired and weak, his muscles shaking and his vision somewhat blurred by reflexive tears as the wind whips at his face. The weight of his over packed bag grows to be

too much, dragging Will down — tugging, an inescapable weight and pull — until he collapses against some snow drift with a small cry of defeat.

He's going to die out here, he thinks. He's going to freeze over, become lost among a pearly white as the snow bears down on him, it worsening and thickening by the second.

He's going to die, and he's going to fail.

All he can think as he passes out is that he's sorry.

-X-

Will is lost. He doesn't know where he is. The space around him is black— a void. It is cold and unforgiving like the world Will thought he had left, but it is also more hellish in the sense that here, he is not as strong as he needed to be.

It's because he sees Jack. He's utterly frustrated.

The man's glare is steady and unwavering, undoubtedly judging Will for his cockup. He tells Will that he never should've assigned him to any case, that he's a special kind of crazy that warrants hospitals and bars, straps and medication. He is harsh with his words, laying it into Will that he is worthless, a no good omega who should've given up and spread his legs a long time ago like a good boy. He would be better at begging like slut while in heat and being pregnant than he would an agent. In fact, he's already proven it with how much he's fucked up thus far.

But much to Will's dismay, he is not the only one announcing their distaste.

Jack's superiors that gave Will his last chance flank the beta like shadows— obscured and dark, inescapable as they swarm. They whisper things— hissing their soft truths about how they've never believed in Will, and that he has never deserved any sort of faith other than the certainty anything he was involved in would be disastrous. He was always a disappointment, always a hindrance that they needed and intended to get rid of. If only he could've made it to his designated location.

If only he could've pulled the trigger.

It always then that she appears beside Jack, a silent tormentor to the very man that damned her to a life of hell. She is pale, practically a fresh corpse, her mouth straight but her neck an ugly smile. The ruined clothes she is wearing are soaked in blood, there being so much of it, red drips from her fingers, steady like a leaky faucet— ***drip, drip, drip*** *towards the ground below where it collects at her feet and pools like the unshed tears along her bottom eyelids.*

Unlike the shadows or Jack, she doesn't have to say anything to him as she bleeds.

Will knows just how much he's failed her.

-X-

Will isn't expecting to wake up, but he does.

The first thing he registers is the sensation of heat. It's a polar opposite to how he felt however long ago, when his entire body felt as though it were turning into ice as he lost consciousness. If anything, he feels cozy and heavy— almost tired.

But—

"Ah, you're awake," it's a soft voice accompanied by the appearance of a hand holding what feels like a warmed, damp cloth as it wipes along his forehead, "I was worried that we had found you too late…"

Will chances to open his eyes, and he has to blink a few times to get his gaze to finally focus some. There's a man above him, older, his hair grayed and his eyes and mouth crinkled with his smile.

"Who—" the omega's voice is raspy, and he has to clear his throat before he tries to speak again, "Who are you?"

"Oh, I'm Elden. Dr. Elden Stammetz, actually," the man clarifies, and Will recognizes the name from the intel he was given, instantly setting him on edge— at least he's in the right place, "Can you care to tell me who you might be exactly, if you don't mind?"

The omega takes in a deep breath, scenting Elden as he does so. He's clearly a beta, and not who he's looking for, per say. All the bureau knew was that the cult he was infiltrating was run by a male alpha who had a doctorate of some sort— nothing but a demented man who had both natural dominance and extensive knowledge. Dr. Elden would greatly shy in comparison to the other, and it settled Will some to know that he was at least sparred from the leader when he regained his consciousness.

"I'm— my name is Hugh," he gathers, recalling the alternate identity the bureau had suggested he use, "Hugh Esmond…"

Dr. Elden beams at that, "Well it's nice to meet you, Mr. Esmond. Oh! Silly me, I almost forgot to ask. How are you feeling now?"

"Much better, but please, just call me Hugh," Will answers honestly, and Dr. Elden nods, "Truth be told, I thought I was going to die out there."

"With how cold and unresponsive you were, I feared the same thing when you were first brought to me. We didn't know how long you had dealt with the exposure, and the weather was absolutely horrid. If you don't mind me asking, why were you out in the woods so late at night, and in the beginning of a blizzard no less?"

It reminds Will to continue on wisely, especially with that glint that Dr. Elden's eyes acquire upon his questionings. He's gauging Will now, seeing if the omega has come with the nefarious intentions he's been instructed to so carefully hide. In some sense, this is do or die. If Will doesn't manage to rid any suspicion of him first thing, he's done here, and there's no question about that.

“My car broke down on the highway,” is what he settles on, “I’ve been meaning to come up to Baltimore for a while, check out some jobs to make some decent money. I used to live in Aberdeen, and they don’t have as many high paying jobs for omegas there, and I was struggling to make ends meet… I don’t really have anywhere else to go, so it was Baltimore or nothing, really…”

Dr. Elden nods in understanding, seemingly losing that defensive undertone in moments, “Do you have anyone we could call? Friends, family?” he tilts his head with an almost poorly hidden sense of intrigue, “Maybe your mate or significant other?”

Dr. Elden’s scoping, Will realizes. After all, Will’s setting Hugh up to be alone with no options; a man at the end of his rope. He knows that’s what the cult is looking for— isolated people who can disappear easily. No one will notice, no one will care. Only a few loose ends that can be tied up with as little as dropping off the radar that they barely registered on. All they want are expendable people who are so secluded and desperate that they’ll do anything — *believe* in anything, if it only gives them a reassuring sense of community and stability.

“I’m unmated and single, unfortunately,” Will says with what he hopes is a genuine smile, “Never had the time to date or make connections with many people...”

“Oh, well, I apologize for my prodding, then. I meant no harm,” Dr. Elden assures.

Will shakes his head, noticing now Dr. Elden seems pleased with the reveal of his status, “No no, it’s fine. There was nothing wrong about it… Most omegas my age are already mated off and have pups. It wasn’t out of turn to ask if I followed through as well.”

“Well, it was rather rude of me to assume,” the beta smiles, walking away over to where a fire crackles in the corner, “And speaking of rude, I apologize. I just realized I hadn’t informed you of the current situation! I bet you’re wondering where you are and what happened by now.”

The omega nods, watching as Dr. Elden places the washcloth he’d used on Will’s forehead into a metal bowl on a vanity off to the side of the crackling fireplace, “Oh, yes. Would you mind telling me?”

“Not at all,” Dr. Elden grins widely, and he goes to the opposite side of the room as Will sits up to watch him as he messes around with some items on his built-in shelves, “You were lucky that the blizzard caught us off guard and that we needed more firewood, otherwise we wouldn’t have dared to venture out there like you had… Anyways, a couple of others found you unconscious while they were trying to gather supplies, and they brought you back here.”

Will notices the beta grabbing a couple of tea packets out of a jar, “And ‘here’ is where, exactly?”

“Why, we’re the more devout members of the Captivate Christian Church in Baltimore. We have some recreational land set aside near the Catoctin Mountain Park, just a little outside of Baltimore itself, and that’s where we are now. I and the others are here for a retreat currently. Had you shown up about a week or two ago, I’m afraid you wouldn’t have been so lucky with us finding you, as the pastor just helped us start our stay here on thirteenth.”

The pastor. Will's harboring a guess that whoever they may be, they'll most likely be the alpha that the bureau suspected of being in control of everyone. He'll definitely have to keep an ear and eye out for this pastor individual.

"Well, then it must've been a miracle that I managed to get found when I did," he grins.

"Yes, it truly was a miracle," Dr. Elden removes a coffee cup out of a cupboard by his small sink, and he overlooks his shoulder to meet Will's gaze, "Would you like some tea? I made some earlier for myself, but I wasn't aware you were going to wake."

Will nods, "That's fine. I could honestly use something to warm my insides… Afraid they're still feeling a bit chilly."

Silence passes for a moment, and in the lapse of conversation, Will can hear the roaring winds outside. He can't gauge how bad it is, though, since the windows have their shutters boarding them up. Still, the bureau had warned him that there was a winter advisory in place, and he's guessing that, even for a cult member, Dr. Elden wasn't lying when it came to the blizzard that was voicing its upset outside of the cabin they were in.

"Here," Will is jolted out of his thoughts by Dr. Elden as he holds out the coffee mug to Will, "It's still brewing some, so you may want to wait a little bit before you drink. I thought you'd like the heat for your hands."

"Oh, thank you," Will takes the cup from the beta and holds it, genuinely enjoying its warmth against his tender hands, "It feels like my tendons are so stiff…"

"You are truly lucky not to have been a victim of hypothermia."

"I suppose I am," Will murmurs, and he brings the cup up to breathe in the steam emanating from it, chancing to take a sip of it, enjoying its sweetness as it goes down his throat before he finally speaks, "So… This pastor of yours… He's not upset at me being here, is he? I'm not imposing on anything?"

Dr. Elden seems thrown by those questions for a few moments, "No, not that I know of. He is aware of your presence, but he is not bothered by it. In fact, he was worried about your wellbeing after you were brought to me."

"Has his disposition changed since I woke up?"

"No one but me is aware that you have regained consciousness," Dr. Elden clarifies, sipping at his own tea, "You have only been here a few hours, I'm afraid, and tonight he is holding an emergency mass to ask for protection from this blizzard, so he has not had any time to see if you are well."

Will nods, looking down towards the contents of his cup, the water darkening as the tea brews, relishing the heat, "Ah. I'm sorry to cause such an upset."

"There's no need to apologize, Hugh. I can assure you that the pastor will not be upset at your arrival, but rather pleased, especially with your recovery," Dr. Elden stands, and he looks

over to Will, “Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have some other matters that need to be attended to. If you could, please, get some more rest once you’re done enjoying your tea. I’m positive you are still not recuperated enough after your snowy bout in the woods tonight, and going out in the blizzard so soon afterwards will just take you back to square one.”

“I understand,” Will sighs, settling back into the bed as he places his mug on the nightstand beside him, feeling more exhausted than he thought, “I think—“ he yawns unexpectedly, “I think I am going to sleep some more as you suggested… Thank you, Dr. Elden.”

The beta grins, all teeth, “It was a pleasure to help you, Hugh. I’ll see you in the morning, and hopefully circumstances will be for the better.”

Will doesn’t get a chance to reply, his eyelids fluttering closed, and his tea left brewing on the nightstand.

-X-

Blood. Will can smell it— can taste it. The tang of rust hangs heavily in the air, saturating everything and seemingly choking Will out. He coughs, gagging in revulsion as it fills his throat, his—

There’s a knife, slicing through his skin. Crimson spills out between the separated flesh, a horrified scream trapped, unable to escape. Life drains away, pooling on the tiles and grout below, running down paling flesh and seeping into now stained clothes.

Will stares at the girl, watching as her father slits her throat and then does the same to himself, eyes fiery and glowering at Will as he manages to slice past his carotid arteries and all the way into his trachea. He falls back against the counter, his own blood spraying outwards and landing on the omega— still hot and fresh from when it had just been flowing in his veins. Will trembles, nothing the man’s gaze— still stuck on Will, still looking despite being dead.

*It’s only as he chances to glance down when he hears gurgling that sees her— her face, her neck. The skin there is shredded, undoubtedly going to scar hideously if she even manages to survive this. She will never be the same, and she gapes at Will because he could’ve saved her from all of this, but he couldn’t— **didn’t**. She stares at Will just like her now deceased father, except she’s still struggling, her neck convulsing violently and spraying rivulets of blood all over as she keeps on bleeding profusely onto the floor.*

Will should step in. He should press the wound closed, call for back up— give her the chance to survive like he should’ve before her father slit her throat. But he doesn’t. He lets her die, her lungs stilling, and her neck still sluggishly and luridly draining.

The gun remains in Will’s unsteady hands, damning and unfired.

-X-

When Will wakes again, this time violently, Dr. Elden is nowhere to be seen. The fire has died down mostly, the pieces of firewood now severely charred and their insides glowing and

releasing a few embers every so often from where they lay in in the hearth. It also offers the only light in the room, it being a soft glow of orange that feels almost surreal to Will as his breathing tries to even.

Despite it having been a few months since he let her down, Will sometimes feels like he can't convince himself that it's over. Maybe it's because the dreams, in a sense, are real. It's what happened, in the end, however twisted its representation may be. He just sometimes wishes that he wasn't reminded of his failure so often… and maybe even so vividly.

The omega stands, knees shaky and stance tottering as he rushes over to the sink. He turns it on roughly, clammy hands cupping the frigid water up until he splashes it onto his face. Will exhales unevenly, his eyes stinging as he runs his palms over them, wishing to cleanse himself of what he had seen— of what he has irrevocably done.

His hands end up bracing his weight along the basin of the sink, and he looks upwards, seeing a small mirror that Dr. Elden had placed against the wall. Will stares at his reflection, wondering what he sees. Wondering what *he* saw.

The uncertainty is more than likely more terrifying than the truth, if it's out there.

But before Will can lament for long, there's a brisk knocking on the door, forcing Will out of his thoughts. He breathes in deeply, willing his hands to try and stop shaking so much.

Without thinking too much about it, Will comes forward, opening the door and expecting Dr. Elden to be at the threshold while the snow and cold berate him. However, much to Will's surprise, Dr. Elden is nowhere to be seen; yet, in his presence, there is another man. Another man who is—

"Oh, pardon me," his voice is deep, full of an accent and baritone that catches Will off guard at first, and Will tries to blink away the brightness of day so he can take in the man's appearance, "I didn't mean to catch you while you were indecent."

Will is about to ask him what he means when he looks down at his clothing— or, to put it more specifically, his underdressed state in comparison to the man's expensive looking attire. Much to Will's dismay, Dr. Elden seems to have removed his jacket and any other layers after his arrival, leaving him in nothing more than his generic, white undershirt and his gray boxers that he just answered the door in.

"Oh! I'm—" Will hunches in on himself some, "I'm so sorry…" Will rushes back inside, feeling the cold settle on his skin far too soon for his tastes, and he tries to look around for his bag, "I was expecting Dr. Elden, and I'm afraid that I can't find my clothes…"

"It's alright, no need to be embarrassed. I wasn't very forthcoming about my arrival. I was just so pleased to hear you had made a full recovery that it seems I forgot about my manners, and I apologize," the other male shuts the door, shedding his overcoat quickly as not to overheat, and ironically, it is then that Will notices he is shivering already, "Are you doing alright? You seem to be freezing."

“Just a l-l-little cold,” Will’s teeth chatter against themselves, much to his dismay, “A-Apparently I’m n-n-not ready for the c-cold yet…”

“Oh, then please, take a seat while I try to make you comfortable as you were before I so rudely barged in,” he promises, and he walks with a brisk pace towards one of the corners of the room where a chest resides and opens it.

Will attempts to relax himself in a nearby chair, his muscles twitching uncontrollably as he tries to salvage whatever body heat he has leftover. Will looks on as the other man grabs a blanket out of the chest, and returns to the omega’s side.

“Here, let’s get you bundled up…”

He pulls the blanket over Will’s shoulder, leaving the omega to grab at it with a shaky hand as he tries to warm himself. His hand brushes against Will’s, just a little bit electrifying as it passes. Will tries not to react to it, instead opting to bundle up as the stranger looms over him. It’s then that the thick scent of the man washes over Will— a thick musk, refined— *alpha.*

Will looks up at the other man, eyes gauging him carefully as he sits on the edge of Will’s unmade bed, “T-Thank you…”

“It was of no grave inconvenience to me, but I appreciate your sentiment,” he smirks, and it reaches up to his eyes— his irises a curious, dark maroon that makes Will pull the blanket in on himself a little further, “Allow me to introduce myself, my name is Dr. Hannibal Lecter.”

“Despite my indecency, it’s nice to meet you, Dr. Lecter,” Will tests, and he notices that the alpha’s smile grows minutely before he continues, “I’m so sorry about not being properly dressed—“

“I assure you, it is of no issue,” Dr. Lecter sighs before he looks around the room, assessing, his voice sincere, “However, the true issue is that Dr. Elden should’ve left a note or your clothes in a visible spot so this grievance was avoidable. I express regret for the inconvenience and for any discomfiture he has caused to you because of this.”

Will chuckles lightly at the gentlemanly behavior, “While it wasn’t the best of situations, I had just woken up. I’m sure I would’ve missed any note he would’ve left me and, well, you caught me off guard.”

There’s a humored light to Dr. Lecter’s eyes at that, “Well, as I mentioned before, I was— rather *pleased,* to hear that you were up and doing well, and I thought I should come check up on you myself, and maybe give you some company other than Dr. Elden.”

“Dr. Elden is okay. A little quirky, but tolerable,” the omega rubs his thumb along the inside of the blanket he’s holding, “I was wondering, actually, um— I’m not imposing on him, or anyone, with me being here? I don’t want to cause any trouble—“

“Oh, nonsense,” Dr. Lecter smiles widely, and he straightens up some with a small amount of pride, “No one is upset about your arrival, no matter how unplanned it was.”

Will shakes his head, trying to appear disbelieving, “Well, I sort of intruded on your retreat, and I felt like I might have put a kink into your plans…”

“You are not unwelcome here, not in any way. In fact, we prayed for you at mass last night—for your recovery. Being a stranger does not exclude you from kindness or acceptance here,” Dr. Lecter smiles, “Besides, with the blizzard, we would not dare turn you away in your time of need.”

“And I thank you for that,” the omega inhales, actually disturbed by the near death experience he had, “I was sure that I was going to die out there…”

“But thankfully we managed to find you,” the doctor gets a twinkle in his eyes, like he really is grateful for the discovery of Will in the woods, “and now you’re safe.”

But there it is—that unnerving feeling again. Will can feel his stomach roll as Dr. Lecter gets a somewhat predatory look in his eyes.

“I, uh—“ Will scrambles some, admittedly, and he hopes that Dr. Lecter will not sense or take his unease negatively, “I was wondering… I need to get to Baltimore sometime soon. I understand that the blizzard may take some time to pass before I can leave, but— . . .”

“Ah, yes,” the alpha reigns himself in some, like the reminder of Will’s desire to departure leaves a sour taste in his mouth, “We’ll see to it that you are headed that way as soon as the storm clears up and the roads are navigable… For the meantime, we’d like to make you as comfortable as possible,” it’s then that Dr. Lecter stands, somewhat towering over Will as he smiles gingerly, “I’m extending an invitation. Tonight we are having another mass, but as a celebration for your recovery. I encourage you to join, unless the cold seems to still be too much for you. Though, I can’t say that I won’t be a little disappointed if you couldn’t attend…”

Will recognizes it then, the guilt tactic. If only Dr. Lecter knew what Will was truly guilty of.

“I’ll try and go, but I guess it all dwindles down to Dr. Elden’s approval and if I can find my clothes,” he poorly jokes.

Surprisingly enough, Dr. Lecter still chuckles, “Well, I hope that you are well enough to come see all of us and enjoy your reclamation. Those who helped you of the woods that night hope to see you now that you’re awake and relatively okay.”

Will nods, “I— I suppose I could try and come see everyone… Give my thanks…”

“Good,” Dr. Lecter nods towards Will and heads towards the door, “I will send Dr. Elden to fetch your clothes as soon as possible, then. Again, sorry about the fiasco.”

“I appreciate it,” Will murmurs, and Dr. Lecter reaches for the door, “Oh, wait—“ the alpha stops, “What time does mass start tonight?”

“Seven,” the alpha replies.

“Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Now, I shall— . . . Hm. . .” the alpha pauses for a moment before laughing as he shrugs his overcoat on, “I would give you a proper goodbye, but it seems that I don’t know your name.”

“Hugh,” Will blurts, “Hugh Esmond. But, as I told Dr. Elden, you don’t need to include any formality to it. Hugh is just fine with me.”

“Well, until tonight, Hugh,” Dr. Lecter smiles at the omega, stepping outside, “I look forward to seeing you at mass.”

“As do I,” Will replies, looking the alpha dead in the eyes before he smirks, and shuts the door.

Will stares at the doorway for a moment, wondering what just transpired between himself and this apparent Dr. Lecter, and what that implies in terms of him surviving this ordeal.

He shrugs off the blanket before he can think about it too much.

-X-

Dr. Elden comes back some time later with Will’s bag, but also with a bruised jaw. Will asks what happened, but the man smiles as much as he can without discomfort, calmly explaining that he had slipped on a patch of ice and had a nasty fall. Will wants to question it more, but knows he can’t, so he pretends to believe the obvious cover story.

So Dr. Elden was punished, and why exactly, Will isn’t too sure. Is it that he left Will unattended when he hasn’t proven himself to be trustworthy? Was it the blatant disregard, in Dr. Lecter’s opinion, of Will’s clothes and state of undress? Maybe there was a disagreement over Will’s ability or right to attend mass tonight…

There’s too many variables to pick from, but either way, Will knows that whatever reprimand that Dr. Elden received, it involved Will in some way. He’s guessing that when Dr. Lecter found out about what had transpired, he decided that Dr. Elden should be reminded of the importance of hospitality.

It worries Will a little. Apparently manners are upheld highly here, and the omega is worrying over what is considered proper and what’s not. He will have to make sure to observe everyone’s actions— to mirror them. In some sense, he’s never been more pleased that his ability of empathy makes it easy to mimic others. It’ll definitely pay off now— it’ll keep him alive.

Hopefully.

Still, Dr. Elden does clarify a few things for Will before he attends mass. He explains the basics as he gathers up clothing for the omega, all thick and expensive looking— none of it is what he had packed. Will doesn’t get much of a choice in his attire, but he decides not to say anything, partially because nothing he brought along could hold up against the cold of the still raging blizzard outside. Tis the perils of a cheap and fatigued wardrobe, apparently.

Even so, Dr. Elden gets him dressed quickly and efficiently, and he steps back, assessing his work. He nods, seemingly pleased, before he pats Will on the shoulder.

“I believe you’re ready to head out, Hugh. I hope you don’t mind the unfamiliar clothes, the pastor was adamant that you have something appropriate for this weather, and he deemed what you had unfitting.”

With a shrug, Will plays along, “Well, I guess what I had didn’t help me much when it mattered, so I’m grateful for this.”

Dr. Elden nods, a pleased smile trying to stretch his lips only to get stopped by his bruise, “Now that you’re ready to go, we can leave for the mass. Is there anything else you think you may need, or— . . . ?”

He leaves the ending open for Will, but the omega shakes his head, “No, there’s nothing else that I can think of. Thank you, though.”

“You’re welcome, Hugh,” Dr. Elden comes to his side, and he grabs a nearby kerosene lantern before intertwining his and Will’s arms together, “Visibility is rather poor this evening, so I suggest you try and stay as close as possible as to not get lost in this blasted weather.”

Will nods, understanding. The last thing he wants to do is end up actually freezing to death.

The wind howls around them, the snow sharp and unforgiving against the minute amounts of skin that Will does not have covered up. Dr. Elden outstretches his arm to give them some amount of lighting, but it’s not giving them much. Still, he seems to know where he’s going, and he manages to lead, with an expected amount of hindrance from the snow storm, Will to what looks like the church they have on site.

“Ah, here we are,” Dr. Elden raises his voice to be heard over the gusts of wind and snow behind them as they ascend a few stairs, allowing them to take some shelter on the large porch— from where they are, Will can hear the others inside despite the lack of view from the shuttered up windows, “Are you feeling alright, Hugh?”

The omega is forcing his teeth not to chatter, “Yes. My face is a little numb, but that’s to be expected…”

“Then, by all means, let’s get you inside.”

Dr. Elden steps in front of Will to reach for two large, wooden doors. They’re elegantly carved, obviously made with the tenderness of care and dedication. Will admires them for a few moments before Dr. Elden manages top open them, barely parting them before ushering to Will.

“Please, come inside quickly. We don’t want to let too much heat out, do we?”

Will nods then, moving with haste. He passes Dr. Elden and enters, immediately engulfed by the new atmosphere and setting of the inside of the church.

There are many candles lit along the walls, making Will wonder if the storm has knocked out the power, or if they're off grid enough to where this place doesn't have access to any electricity sans maybe a few generators, if they had any. Still, he looks around, taking in the crowd of people — at least thirty, of all varying ages, and as he scents, also of all varying sexes — but also the décor. It's— unusual, to say at the least.

From all that Dr. Elden and Dr. Lecter had hinted towards, Will expected something a little more— well, Christian. And while there is obvious ties to the Christian faith, there are— . . . *other,* things. There are certain symbols painted onto the walls, carefully mapped out despite the implied simplicity of its scant amount of lines. There are skulls of various animals set around, all either accompanied by burning candles, or small, unidentifiable wrappings— *offerings,* Will suspects.

Will's skin begins to form a few goosebumps, because he was not expecting this. It makes the reality of infiltrating a cult — one that is apparently nothing like the bureau has handled before — that much more apparent. Whatever they believe in, Will has never heard of. He's sure that outside of this place, no such combination exists. And just how is he supposed to adapt to it if he's doesn't have any prior knowledge to work with?

So. Staying alive and out of trouble may be much harder than anticipated… It's the last thing he needs.

Dr. Elden surprises Will with a hum at his side, and he sets a hand on Will's shoulder, "Would you like to see anything before mass starts?"

Will is about to answer, but he doesn't get the chance. Dr. Elden's hand slips away as though Will had somehow burned him, and a low growl vibrates through the air as the doctor tries to put some space between himself and the omega. Will is utterly confused, and everyone stops their chatter immediately as they hear the displeased rumbling echoing through the rafters. It even sets Will on edge, and he tries to find the source until it stops altogether.

"Ah, Hugh!" Will's head snaps over towards the direction of that familiar voice, and he sees Dr. Lecter among a group of people, all of which are quiet and unsettled to some degree as Will is, "You made it!"

As though no growling had occurred, Dr. Lecter approaches with a friendly smile, and with some hesitancy, the conversations that had been silenced earlier begin to resume. Will swallows uneasily, but tries to smile at Dr. Lecter before he seems impolite or disturbed.

"I did make it, thanks to Dr. Elden."

Dr. Lecter looks over at the beta, eyes narrowing for a split second before they go back to their playful nature, "Well, I must thank you then, Dr. Elden, for insuring our guest of honor made it here safely."

"I-It was my pleasure," he murmurs, and he bows respectfully.

So Dr. Lecter has some authority of some sort. Is it because of his sex? Maybe he has important ties to the pastor here, and others fear him for it…

The omega clears his throat, trying to calm the obvious power tension between the two doctors, “I’d love to chat, but Dr. Elden just offered to show me around, and I thought it would be interesting to take a look at everything before mass began.”

At that, Dr. Lecter’s eyes alight, “A tour *would* be rather pleasing wouldn’t it?” he asks Will, and when the omega nods, Dr. Lecter glances towards Dr. Elden, his demeanor growing somewhat cold, “Dr. Elden, John was wondering if you could assist him with the arrangements for tonight. If you could help him, it would be greatly appreciated while I take Hugh on the tour he’s asked so nicely for.”

Dr. Elden nods in understanding, lowering his head and respectfully not meeting Dr. Lecter’s eyes, “Then I shall take my leave. If you’d both excuse me...”

Dr. Elden parts from them both, some urgency in his steps as he walks away, like he wants nothing more than to be out of Dr. Lecter’s presence as he slips into the crowd of people. Dr. Lecter, however, is happy and smiling, looking at Will as he extends out his arm in invitation.

“Shall we, then?”

Will steps forward, trying to appear at ease when he is bothered some by the interactions between Dr. Elden and the alpha he is approaching. Never before has Will seen such an obvious power dynamic between a beta and an alpha— of submission and acceptance and all around compliance. Even in the bureau Jack would sometimes stand up to his alpha superiors despite himself being a beta, or, like in one rare case, when Zeller made a bad judgement call and was reprimanded by Jack, even with Zeller being an alpha who happened to work below him. It’s not common to see what some would consider a traditional hierarchy between alphas and others, and it worries Will some, considering he can’t change his sex like he can his name, and it could be far more damning than the latter. He’s an omega, after all, and they are known for much else other than heats and their ability to bear pups in traditional terms.

As he closes in, Will is hoping that Dr. Lecter chalks up his nerves as a social anxiety of sorts, if he notices. Even if he does, he makes no mention of it, gladly hooking their arms together once Will is close enough. Around the room, others’ gazes are about as palpable as Dr. Lecter’s arm once Will’s hand settles on it. The omega catches a few gazes, and he notices how, once he meets them, the others’ look away much like Dr. Elden had.

Dr. Lecter doesn’t seem bothered by it this time. As a result, Will is guessing that he’s used to everyone staring at him, and it doesn’t make him nervous as it does Will. Still, he doesn’t waste any time by leading Will away from all of those sets of eyes.

“So, Hugh, what would you like to see first?” Dr. Lecter sounds somewhat prideful, as though this is showing off for him.

Quietly, Will answers, “Anything, I suppose... I’ve— I’ve never quite seen a place of worship such as yours.”

“We believe more so than others that it is important to stick to what is true,” Dr. Lecter leads Will through the middle isle, their sides bracketed by the occasional pew they pass— as they continue walking, Will looks up at the pulpit at the center of the stage at the back of the

room, “Here, we believe in two sets of rules. Ones from our ancestors, and ones that are more mannerly and human. It’s a ying to a yang, truthfully— a careful balance.”

“Ah,” Will begins to understand now, “So, uh, what combination, is it exactly?”

“It is a combination of my native religion, and the one I was exposed to when I came to the states to study in medicine,” the alpha supplies as they step up onto the small stage, and they reach the pulpit in just a few strides.

Will stares at Hannibal, noting how his finger reverently runs along the edge of the pulpit, admiring the lectern, “Oh. Where are you from, then?”

With a grin, Dr. Lecter drops his hand away and lets it remain at his side, “I’m from Lithuania,” Will wonders how that might affect things when Dr. Lecter asks, “What about you, Hugh? Where are your origins?”

“I’m from Louisiana, originally,” there’s no need to lie about it— he can sometimes have a bit of his own accent on him without realizing, “but I left in my teen years for better places…” Will plans to leave it at that, until cleverly, he adds, “I guess I just haven’t found one yet.”

“What a shame,” the smile that Dr. Lecter sports is almost predatory, making Will almost regret his last second addition if it weren’t his goal to seemingly appear as prey, “Hugh, if you don’t mind me asking… What happened that caused you to end up here?”

“I was going to Baltimore for better job opportunities, since they’re more lax about omegas working on their own than places in Aberdeen,” Will doesn’t miss how Dr. Lecter catches that small bit of hidden information— that he believes Hugh’s unknowingly admitted that he is alone, “I was on my way there when my car broke down on the highway. There wasn’t any cell reception, so I made the rash decision to find help. I knew the park was nearby so I— I thought I could find someone, maybe. I didn’t count on the weather to get as bad as it did.”

With a sympathetic frown, Dr. Lecter says, “What a horrible situation you found yourself in. I’m so sorry that happened to you, Hugh.”

“While it was terrifying, I’m glad that I at least was found,” Will smiles softly, making Dr. Lecter mirror the action, “Uh, I was wondering…” he runs his fingers along the pulpit as Dr. Lecter had, and he doesn’t miss the way the alpha’s eyes track his fingers as he does so, “What happens up here?”

“This is where our beliefs are preached during our sermons,” Dr. Lecter explains, distracted now with explaining things to Will, “You will see later how we practice and exercise our faith.”

Will nods, and he looks over to the side, seeing a hallway and blurting, “What’s over there?”

“Oh, that leads to the rest of the church here,” he pauses, “Would you like to see it?”

“I wouldn’t mind,” Will beams.

They intertwine their arms and walk off of the stage and into the hallway, the white noise of everyone's conversations dying out as they distance themselves from the others. Dr. Lecter is quiet, but it allows Will to take in his surroundings, noticing a kitchen and a few storage rooms as he passes.

"What all is in here?"

"Some of the basics, such as utilities and storage. However, we are nearing the confession room."

Will's brows furrow in some confusion, "I thought confessions were done in a booth near the pulpit."

"While that is true for most traditional churches, we value confessions highly, and decided that we needed space to do so," Dr. Lecter leads Will into a room at the end of the hallway and places his free hand on the door, "To be cleansed of our sins, we need to have something more than just a small booth hidden in veils."

Dr. Lecter opens the door, revealing the room before him. It seems like a large, empty space, sans a large wardrobe against the wall that is straight ahead of them. It's almost as if it's looking at Will— judging him, as though it can see and evaluate Will, knowing exactly what sins he's committed.

"This is where we try and cleanse ourselves. We admit our wrongs— the sins we've committed…" Dr. Lecter pauses, and looks down at Will, "Do you have any sins to talk about, Hugh?"

He gets flashes of her face— of her father. It's like he can still smell all of the blood, can feel the gun weigh his hands down and down until he can't raise it— can't take aim at his heart before he can't grab the knife and wield it.

"You— you seem uncomfortable," Dr. Lecter makes Will flinch unintentionally, "Are you cold again?"

"I guess," Will looks away from the space, "Could you— could you take me back into the main room?"

Dr. Lecter eyes him carefully, but nods.

The walk back into the main room is quiet, and Will feels like he might be sick to his stomach. It's like he can still hear her screams— see her father in her eyes as she bled out below him.

"Hugh, you don't look well," Dr. Lecter comments with genuine concern, and he gets a bit closer, offering more support to Will as the omega tries to calm his nerves, "Do you need to head back to Dr. Elden's cabin?"

"I— I probably should… I don't— I don't feel that well…"

Dr. Lecter nods, "Then I'll help you back, then, since Dr. Elden is unavailable."

Will doesn't try and argue, he's too busy trying not to vomit.

No one stops Dr. Lecter from leaving, but they do look confused as to why he is heading out with Will.

"I'm not— I'm not keeping you from anything, am I?"

"Service is going to begin here shortly, but your health is more important at the moment. Please, do not worry yourself."

The omega wants to argue about it, but doesn't. Rather, he leans into the alpha, feeling so sick as she floods into his mind. He wants to cry— wants to scream, but all he can do is breathe roughly and hope he won't have any bile come up from his throat.

"I'll be back here in a few moments," Dr. Lecter announces to the others, and they nod in understanding.

Dr. Lecter then wastes no time, grabbing a different kerosene lantern and shepherding Will towards the double doors. The alpha opens them quickly, and once they are out on the porch and by themselves out in the cold, Dr. Lecter pulls Will close.

"Try and stay with me as best as you can," he instructs, and Will nods.

They stumble a few times, the snow deep and unforgiving as Dr. Lecter guides them. Will hiccups a couple of times, feeling himself gag a little as though his bile was replaced by crimson. It makes Dr. Lecter send Will a few worried glances, but the omega doesn't meet his eyes. He's afraid of what the doctor may see.

Eventually they make it to Dr. Elden's cabin, and Dr. Lecter forces the door open. The fire must've died out sometime beforehand, leaving the room dark and cold as they enter. Will, despite his layers, is shivering again— but this time, it's not exactly from the cold.

Dr. Lecter, however, doesn't know otherwise. He rushes over to the fireplace, hurriedly getting wood and placing it into the hearth. Will manages to get to his bed, and he settles down in it, legs shaky, and his palms cupping his face. He overhears the storm outside and the swipe of a matchstick against the sticker on the box, soon followed by the crackling and bright light that manages to seep into the spaces between his fingers. A few footsteps can be heard afterwards, and they get louder as Dr. Lecter comes back over to Will.

"Are you alright, Hugh?" the bed beside the omega dips with Dr. Lecter's weight, "You look as pale as a sheet."

"I'm— I'm fine… Mostly," he doesn't uncover his face, "I guess I wasn't ready for tonight… Sorry about that."

Dr. Lecter hums, "Maybe you've caught a bug of some sort while you were under duress, but it is nothing to be ashamed of," Will feels the broad palm of Dr. Lecter's hand place itself on his back, and it rubs into his shoulders, "I'll tell the others that you are ill, and that you need

more time to get better. They will understand, and we'll pray for you once more so that you are not sick for long."

"I— I appreciate that."

"It is our pleasure to offer our support," Dr. Lecter's hand then falls away, somewhat lingering on Will's shoulder before he then stands, "I apologize profusely, but I am needed in the church at this moment. I wish I could stay longer and ensure you're comfortable, but the others won't be able to go forward with the service without me. They don't know how to truly pray on their own," Will could practically envision the bemused grin that he's sporting, and he decides then to look at the alpha and take it in for himself, his hands falling towards his lap, "Till next time, Hugh."

Before Will could react, the alpha gently grips onto one of his wrists, bringing his hand up to his mouth as he kneels some, caressing the flesh with his lips for a split second before he presses a warm, chaste kiss there. Will's eyes widen some in surprise, in combination of both shock and what he sees.

From this angle, Will can see past the collar of Dr. Lecter's heavy overcoat that he's been wearing, and he sees it— sees the clerical collar adorning the man's neck.

Dr. Lecter pulls back then, smiling at Will fondly before nodding his way. He turns, heading towards the door, leaving Will reeling on the bed. His stomach reels, and Will can't help it. He rushes towards the small bathroom off to the side of the kitchen, and he barely makes it to the toilet before he's puking. It takes him a minute or two, but once he's done clearing his stomach, Will stares at the ceiling, eyes watery, throat burning, and his mind a mess.

Dr. Lecter… He— he's the *pastor*.

"I'm a dead man," Will chokes out, and huddles in on himself.

It's only his first day here, and he's already managed to catch the interest and apparent fancy of the alpha leader of the very cult he's infiltrating. He lifts his arm up, still feeling where Dr. Lecter's lips pressed against his flesh— how it still almost feels damp, like his lips are still there, almost like a promise for more.

His hands have never felt so damning before.

Day 2

Chapter Summary

The lines between truth and lies is very thin. Much like touching fire, there are things that you shouldn't do if you don't want to get hurt for something as simple as curiosity.

(Also, from now on, religious terminologies, or other information that needs to be clarified within this fic, will be located within the top author's note. Please read it to avoid confusion.)

Chapter Notes

IMPORTANT INFORMATION:

1) For future reference, the summary for this fic is going to change. I was not satisfied with the one I settled with, but it was all that I could choose from what I had picked at the time. So please, expect change on that end some time in the foreseeable future.

2) I'd also like to clarify that there isn't a word goal in chapters, either, so don't expect too much nor too little from an update.

-x-

Okay, so truth be told, the church scene was a little hard to write because I needed to find some legit verses that would work with the scene and message of Hannibal's preaching for the night (I ended up settling with what he actually quoted in the show). Still, I managed to finish it. (:
~~I honestly think Hannibal sounds a little corny, but I tried, okay?~~

Another thing that was going on was I had to figure out where to place and connect the other minor characters from the show within the story. It was a little frustrating in the beginning, but I managed to work it out.
(Elise is growing to be one of my favorites, and I'll admit that building up Elise's characterization was a bit of a challenge considering she was created to be a victim and never got any characterization. But still, I'm growing quite fond of her.)

I'd also just like to put it out there that Gideon is expected to be somewhat OOC, since he doesn't claim to be the "Ripper" as he doesn't necessarily exist in this story. He's basically a posh, egotistical alpha and nothing more expect a plot further-er. The only difference between him and Hannibal is that Hannibal can cook. Maybe. Truthfully, I wouldn't eat anything that either of them made. ~~I say that but some of the shit that Hannibal makes looks pretty tasty, even though it's people. . . I don't think this is healthy~~

~~reasoning, personally. . . I should not try and rationalize this when I'm hungry, especially.~~

In this chapter, you also experience more of the "religious side" of the so called retreat. I loosely explored aspects of both Lithuanian Paganism and Roman Catholicism, though it was focused more so on the latter than the former. Even so, it was actually fun to study the traits of both religions and learn about their idiosyncrasies as it was to find a mixture between them.

Also, I realized now that there are going to have to be a few vocabulary terms put up in the author's note, just in case, because I'm not sure how familiar everyone is with some terminologies, as some are not common:
Omnism: the practice and belief of two or more religions by a single body, such as a person or group.
Clerical Collar: a stiff upright white collar that fastens at the back, worn by the clergy in some churches.
Vestments: otherwise known as clerical clothing, are the dressings that clergy members wear, and that can vary with appearances and placements on the body among other formal forms of attire.
Pulpit: a raised platform or lectern in a church or chapel from which the preacher delivers a sermon.
Mass: the Christian Eucharist or Holy Communion, especially in the Roman Catholic Church.
Confession: a formal admission of one's sins with repentance and desire of absolution, especially privately to a priest as a religious duty.
Eucharist: the Christian ceremony commemorating the Last Supper.
Communion: the specific part during Eucharist in which bread and wine are consecrated and consumed, or blessings are offered to those who refuse the wine and bread.

Also, I'm tired and finished this instead of mowing because it started raining today, and I had nothing to do. I also didn't beta like I kinda did for the first chapter, so if there's any MAJOR mistakes just shoot it my way via comment and I'll take care of it when I get around to loosely beta-ing this trash. Thank you.

I'm going to go take a nap now.

Enjoy!~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

That night, Will doesn’t sleep well.

His mind is too awake for anything constant or deep, as he mentally keeps going over every possibility of what might happen. He knows, from what the bureau told him, that Dr. Lecter is a force to be reckoned with. Before he started to settle himself in Baltimore, the alpha

roamed from place to place, gathering up groups of people from churches he attended and brainwashing them, slowly but surely. He was demanding, always expecting of his followers, and he dug in so deep he could convince them to do anything.

And Will has an idea of how far he makes them go. He's seen a few of the pictures.

It's the reason he can't rest— constantly too aware that he has managed to catch the apparent interest of the man the bureau warned him to try and not get involved with. It's only been his first day, and he already has been on the arm of the alpha, getting a grand tour of the small empire he managed to build for himself.

His biggest fear, however, is what it means for him— what it entitles. Dr. Lecter is nearly insatiable when it comes to what he wants. And this time, what he wants just so happens to be none other than the unlucky omega Will Graham. Or, to others, Hugh Esmond. Still, it's not a comforting thought, because having a different name doesn't mean he doesn't have a different face, or a different body. It won't matter what he goes by when all Dr. Lecter cares about is having Will on his knot.

And that's what Will dreams of. Instead of it being her again, it's Dr. Lecter. It's him smiling, his canines glinting as he presses his lips to Will's hands— his neck. It's his rumble right in Will's ear, it's his fingers gripping onto Will's hips as he—

"Hugh, are you alright?" as a hand jostles him, Will nearly jolts upwards out of the bed, his eyes opening suddenly in shock as Dr. Elden leans over him with a concerned expression while his hands pull back from Will apologetically, "Were you— I think you were having a nightmare of sorts."

"I—" Will takes a deep breath, leaning up and looking around the room, trying to make sure that Dr. Lecter wasn't present despite the lingering buzz along his skin from where he is sure that the alpha touched him, "I guess I was…"

Dr. Elden frowns, leaning back as Will completely sits up, "Do you want to talk about it?"

Will shakes his head, "I'd rather not…"

The beta nods, understanding despite the obvious worry etched on his features.

Will sighs, and he places his face into his hands, "What time is it?"

"It's near noon. I've been up since five this morning, but I thought I'd let you sleep. You looked like you needed it."

The omega snorts, "That's an understatement… Anyways, how did mass go last night?"

"It was just fine. We prayed, even spared a little moment for you again. Everyone wishes for you to be well. Alongside that, the blizzard was still causing some issues, but even so it's lightening up. We've received forecasts off of the radio last night that rumored the storm ending sometime tomorrow."

Will throws his feet over the edge of the bed, and he can hear Dr. Elden walk away as he focuses on his lap, “That’s good at least,” the omega rubs at his neck, trying to scare the mental images of a certain alpha out of his head, “I— I was wondering... Dr. Lecter, he— is he the pastor you’ve been talking about?”

“Why yes,” at the mentioning of Dr. Lecter, Dr. Elden stiffens, his demeanor becoming slightly cold as he turns toward Will, eyes narrowed, “Why do you ask about him?”

“I— I saw his clerical collar last night, or, I at least think I did,” Will murmurs, his mind having flashes of the alpha kissing his skin, making Will grab onto the hand consciously, “I made note to ask you to be sure if he was, since I wasn’t sure why he was wearing one until now… I had no idea he was running things here. He doesn’t look or seem like the type to be a clergyman, really.”

At Will’s comment, Dr. Elden takes a few steps towards the omega, his movements calculated as his tone darkens, “Mr. Esmond, do you have a problem with Dr. Lecter being the pastor?”

The beta is staring Will down, reminding Will that above all, he must be careful, “No no! I just— I was surprised, is all,” Dr. Elden loses some of his aggressiveness then, hearing the somewhat honest fear in Will’s voice, “I have no doubt that Dr. Lecter is an amazing pastor. I just— I didn’t know he was one… I’m sorry if I caused any offense.”

“None taken, at least with me,” Dr. Elden sighs, and he loses all of his fire in moments, his expression somber, “Just— please, for future reference, try and— *consider,* what you’re saying. Others may not give you a chance to explain yourself if they believe your words to be vulgar and slanderous. Being uncouth here is regarded fairly lowly, and won’t be tolerated.”

It makes Will swallow uneasily, “How would I avoid being rude, then?”

“Truthfully, try not to say much. There are people here that would try and take your words an entirely different way than what you actually mean,” Dr. Elden places himself down in a chair by the wall, and he rubs at his forehead, his bruise still looking as ugly as yesterday, “People here— . . . They assume things. The lines between truth and lies is very thin. It can be blurred, even used against you if someone wishes,” the beta lifts his head from his hand, his eyes locked onto Will as his voice turns serious, “Hugh, you must be careful. You are not used to how things work here. I— I don’t want anything to happen to you for simply being naïve.”

The uneasiness that Will is feeling grows, and he leans forward, “Dr. Elden... Is there something you’re not telling me?”

The man looks as though he said too much, and he goes rigid, his tone and face forcibly impassive, “I believe I have said enough… Believe me, I am trying not to scare you, Hugh, but you must understand. Much like touching fire, there are things that you shouldn’t do if you don’t want to get hurt for something as simple as curiosity,” and at that, Dr. Elden stands, grabbing his jacket off of its rack roughly, only to begin shoving the coat on and grabbing onto his scarf as he throws it crudely onto his shoulders, “I must go now, Hugh. I— I am

sorry for causing so much disturbance. For your comfortability, I will speak to Dr. Lecter of letting you be free of my ill manners."

Before Will can even speak, Dr. Elden rushes out of the cabin, the light from outside nearly blinding Will until the door slams shut, leaving Will alone as the fire crackles and the wind howls outside.

Dr. Elden has never acted so strangely until now, not even when he was suspicious of Will after he first woke up, or even when Will inadvertently questioned his pastor. There is something that has the man frightened for Will, something bad enough that, from what Will could guess, he chose to speak out of turn about it, probably even endangering himself in the process of his cryptic admission. Whatever it may be, it worries Will. It worries him a lot.

Because what could possibly be so horrible that Dr. Elden felt it was necessary to warn Will to keep him safe, but in turn also damn himself in the process?

The lines between truth and lies is very thin. Much like touching fire, there are things that you shouldn't do if you don't want to get hurt for something as simple as curiosity.

As though it were a bright, red flag, Will looks down at the hand that Dr. Lecter had kissed last night, and wonders if it was too late, as he had already gotten himself burned.

-X-

Sometime later, Will makes up his mind. Dr. Elden has still not returned to his cabin yet, leaving the omega to resolve himself to gathering his outwear and layering himself.

Much to his dismay, Will needs to talk to Dr. Lecter— needs to assure him that his placement with Dr. Elden is not as troubling as the beta is making it out to be. It's because Will's mission requires a weak point— an in. Dr. Elden was beginning to lose his resolve around Will, fearful for him and concerned of what may happen to the omega. His distress is what could give Will an edge, could give him a chance at truly surviving this mess. If Dr. Lecter finds out about Dr. Elden's warning, he may very likely permanently silence the beta as a result.

And, if Will were somewhat honest— . . . He doesn't want anything bad happening to Dr. Elden either, even if—

No. *No.* Dr. Elden, even with some amount of compassion for Will or not, is a cult member. He is as guilty, if not more, as everyone else here. Will shouldn't let himself forget that— of what every single person here is capable of doing.

There is no one here looking out for him but himself.

But that doesn't lessen Will's resolve when it comes to talking Dr. Lecter out of moving him. Even if Dr. Elden may be just as dangerous as everyone else, Will has to keep working at the man's crumbling walls if Will wants to finish this case.

So Will heads out, not sure where he's heading. Just like the past few days, visibility is poor, as is the terrain. The snow is deeper than yesterday, and Will struggles with his balance as he tries to maneuver his way in what he hopes is the right direction to the church.

However, before he can lose his way, a hand grabs onto Will's arm, making him shout as he tumbles into the snowbank below.

"Sorry!" Will scrambles to get up, failing until whoever surprised and accidentally knocked him over offers their assistance, "I— I didn't mean to scare or knock you over!"

As Will rights himself, he finds that he is face to face with a young teenager who looks like— like—

Like *her*.

She outstretches a hand that is about as hopeful as the look in her gray-blue eyes— her loose brown hair that is not held in place by her juniper colored beanie is blowing somewhat wildly in the wind as she looks up at him apologetically, her voice somewhat of a shout to be overheard past the wind, "My name is Elise Nichols. I don't know who you are, so I'm guessing that you're the omega that was rescued the other night… Hugh, was it?"

"Y-Yes," Will stutters out, still wide-eyed and disbelieving of the girl before him.

"Well, if you don't mind me asking," she smirks crookedly, "why were you about to wander into the woods again?"

"The— the woods?" Will is shocked out of his thoughts by his confusion, until he looks up, noticing then that the snow has cleared enough for a tree line to vaguely be visible, "Well I, uh, I've seemed to have lost my way again, apparently."

Her smile warms up as it stretches, "Where were you headed?"

"The church," the omega replies, adding, "I need to talk to the pastor. It's— it's kind of urgent."

"If you say so," Elise's grin doesn't lessen any, but she grabs ahold of Will's hand then without any hesitancy, "Just follow me, Hugh. It would be an indignity to allow you to get lost in the woods after all of the trouble it caused to bring you back."

"I guess it would be pretty ironic," Will sighs, and they begin to talk alongside one another, the girl taking the lead.

She glances at him out of the corner of her eye, "You should be glad that my parents asked me to get some firewood, otherwise you'd be becoming an icicle right now."

Will snorts, trying not to shiver, "Wasn't fun the first time I tried it. I don't really like the cold anymore."

She shrugs, "I've gotten used to it. Happens when you've been here for a few months."

“You just moved to Baltimore?”

“Yeah, not too long ago. My parents made the decision to move because they’re very religious, a lot more so than others... In case you didn’t know, Baltimore has the very first church built in the United States for Roman Catholics— the Baltimore Basilica,” she snorts, making a face that Will would expect any teenager to make when it came to the topic of their parents, “I guess they just wanted to be closer to God or something.”

The makes Will frown, “But *you* could probably care less, right?”

At that, Elise turns, her eyes wide, “Excuse me?”

Immediately, Will flounders, remembering what Dr. Elden had warned him of when it came to his curiosity, “I— I didn’t mean to speak out of turn. I’m sorry.”

Elise looks at him for a moment, taking a deep breath before she answers, “No, don’t— don’t apologize… I can be honest with you. You’re— you’re not like the others…”

“I’m not?”

“Well you’re not at this retreat by choice, are you?” she points out.

Her wit makes Will grin bemusedly, “No, I guess I’m not…” his grin falls, “But you aren’t either, are you?”

Elise’s smile is tight, obviously unhappy as she looks ahead as they walk, “No, not really. My parents wanted to come here, like I said, for God and the church. They’re good people, but— they’re naïve…”

“Naïve how?”

“Naïve as in prayers always work,” Elise huffs, her face scrunching up in a sour scowl as she continues, “They think that because we’re here, they can save me.”

That makes Will frown in confusion, “Save you?”

Elise slows to a stop and laughs. She laughs, despite the blizzard around them and laughs despite Will looking at her with growing concern. She keeps laughing for a moment before she stops, a tear or two collected on her bottom eyelid that she wipes away quickly with her sleeve.

“Elise?” Will turns towards her further, obviously worried, “Are you okay?”

“I’m f-fine— well, I’m not, but—“ she laughs again, it turning more into a short cry before she looks at Will with a somber sort of mirth about her, “I don’t know why I’m telling you this, really. You’re just a stranger if we wanna think about it.”

The omega’s brows furrow, “Elise, whatever it is, you can tell me…”

“Look, Hugh,” she sighs, gathering herself and taking a deep breath, “let’s just get you to the church for right now. You already have snot dripping out of your nose.”

“Oh!” Will quickly brings his arm up to wipe away at his nostrils, grimacing as he finds that Elise is right about the snot, “I guess we should keep on walking then.”

“The church isn’t too far,” Elise comments idly, and she begins pulling at Will again, “Make sure to keep up.”

As they resume their trip to the church, Will wonders what could possibly be happening with Elise. His guess is that by “save,” Elise means through her position on religion. Will knows that a majority of teenagers now are big into things like atheism or being agnostic, and it wouldn’t surprise Will if Elise’s parents weren’t approving of such religious stances. Quite possibly this “retreat” was meant to convince Elise to follow in her parents’ footsteps.

And it bothers Will— bothers him because Elise looks like a smart, strong girl who’s coming into herself. A girl who hasn’t even presented or experienced the world for herself yet. A girl who hasn’t graduated high school or picked a college to attend. A girl who, instead of being a regular teenager her age, is stuck in a secret cult in the mountains by her overly religious parents. A girl who—

A girl who doesn’t deserve any of what’s happening to her.

It makes Will’s heart ache, because Elise doesn’t deserve it. And maybe it’s partly because Elise reminds Will of *her,* with the same colored hair and wind-chaffed skin. He sees the same youth and spirit in Elise, the way she looks at the world with a sort of understanding that makes her gaze older than what she actually is. It’s the same way *she* was when Will met her.

When Will *failed* her.

And so when Will looks at Elise, he makes up his mind.

He won’t fail her either.

-X-

They arrive at the church some time afterwards, and Will is sure to knock the snow off his boots at the door, trembling softly as the cold seeps just barely through his outwear. Beside him, Elise lets out a deep breath, and she surveys the room while Will struggles to wipe his nose.

Her voice echoes throughout the vacant room, “The pastor should be here right now… It’s Sunday today.”

“Then I guess he’s busy with it being Sunday and all,” Will frowns, and he ends up sighing, “Do you think I’ll have a chance to talk to him today?”

“Probably not. The pastor has many responsibilities on Sundays,” she gets a steeled look about her when she says this, “Maybe we should go…”

Elise turns for the doors, looking somewhat pale as she reaches for one of the knobs.

“Ah, Hugh!” that voice makes Will stiffen up, and he looks over to where a beaming Dr. Lecter is standing near the beginning of the hallway at the back of the room, his hands wrapped up in a towel like his neck is with the clerical collar that still makes Will uneasy, “And surprise, Elise as well! Nice to see you both so soon before the service tonight! Especially you, Hugh,” Will does not miss how the man’s smirk widens, “Are you feeling better now?”

Will tries to return the smile, “Uh, yes. I am feeling a little better… But that’s not what I came here about…”

Dr. Lecter scowls lightly, “Is there a problem that you have, Hugh?”

“Yes, no— sort of?” Will pauses while Dr. Lecter eyes him, trying not to squirm, “It’s about Dr. Elden.”

At Dr. Elden’s name, Dr. Lecter’s face grows somewhat dark, “Is that so?”

“Y-Yes, but it’s nothing bad, I promise you.”

The alpha assess Will’s words for a moment before he turns his gaze to Elise, “Could you excuse us, Elise?”

“Yes, sir,” she bows somewhat politely, turning, even stealing a glance at Will as she goes.

Dr. Lecter waits until Elise is gone, the doors shutting behind Will as the alpha begins to talk, his voice vaguely toned with intrigue, “So, what is going on between you and Dr. Elden that warrants a discussion with me?”

Will’s eyes follow the alpha as he begins to walk up the stage to the pulpit, “It’s nothing, really… But has Dr. Elden come to you today as well, or has it just been me?”

The alpha is quiet, not answering for a moment. Instead, he places a medium metal cross onto the pulpit, his gaze focused on the cross as he speaks.

“I have not seen Dr. Elden since last night at mass,” and then, he looks up, brows pinched, “Why do you ask?”

“There’s— there might have been a misunderstanding…” the omega does not miss how Dr. Lecter places the rag he’d been using inside one of the compartments in the pulpit, its white cloth somewhat pink as he stashes it, “Dr. Elden believes he was being imposing on me, and mentioned coming to you about placing me somewhere else here…I wanted to tell you that it wasn’t necessary.”

Dr. Lecter laughs, making his way down the stairs and heading towards Will, “Hugh, it would be rather impolite of me to not make room for you while you stay with us. You were merely residing with Dr. Elden since you were sick, and now that you find yourself in better health, you needn’t stay in his cabin anymore.”

“Yes, but I— I’m not sure how long I’m going to be staying for.”

That makes Dr. Lecter’s expression sour, “While that is true, with the current weather, it could take some time before the roads are clear,” he’s coming up on Will now, his voice stern while he tells the omega what is to happen, “They start in the city first, and then the highways.”

“That’s good, though,” the omega says hopefully, “I got here from the highway.”

“Yes, but you walked here through the woods, did you not?” Dr. Lecter points out.

Will takes a deep breath, not enjoying the smug look the alpha has about him from the correction, “I did walk, yes...”

“Then you are unaware that we are not directly attached to the highway, but rather through some isolated roads throughout the forest here,” Dr. Lecter’s eyes get a predatory look about them, “While the highways and city streets may be usable, we’re not a top priority. It’ll take some time before our roads are cleared and we will be able to return you to the city.”

“How long do you think that will take?”

“Visitation to the park is not high during the winter, so it may take a few days before they can get to us. Or, it won’t be until the snow melts away, which isn’t likely with how cold it’s been recently.”

Will swallows uneasily, “So I’m going to have to suck it up and wait for a bit then, is what you’re saying…”

The alpha reaches Will then, “Yes, but I promise that it won’t be a hardship. We will try to make you as comfortable as possible why you’re here.”

“Am I still getting moved out of Dr. Elden’s cabin?”

Dr. Lecter frowns minutely, “It would be impolite of me to leave you in his cabin, as well as very inconsiderate as he is an unmated beta and you are an unmated omega. I don’t wish for anything to happen to you if a certain situation arose.”

It bothers Will some that Dr. Lecter would pull the ‘instinct’ card, “Dr. Elden seems like a very level-headed beta, and he is a doctor trained to deal with omegas in all sorts of ‘situations’. I don’t think he’d come after me just because I’m an omega sharing a space with him.”

And then, Dr. Lecter gets this look about him, a sort of shadowed aura as well, and he nears Will, closing in the distance between them. He gets close enough that Will can distinctly scent him— a cinnamon-like burn along Will’s nostrils. The alpha’s maroon eyes are dark, looking directly into Will’s eyes before leaving them, examining the omega’s face as a finger gently places itself on the edge of Will’s jaw.

“Dr. Elden is a beta by nature— by the will of the gods,” his voice rumbles in the chapel like thunder, making Will stiffen some as he feels Dr. Lecter’s fingertip trace his jawline until he

reaches his chin, “However, he was never meant to be strong like an alpha. While he has trained to handle omegas— even ones in the throes of heat, he has not been exposed to an omega to the likes of you, dear Hugh. Weak betas such as Dr. Elden would never know how to handle themselves or you because they weren’t meant to,” and then, Dr. Lecter’s eyes dance back up to Will’s again, though they stop to appraise his lips on the way ever so subtly, “You are so much more than a textbook scenario, Hugh. Do not belittle yourself to the levels of such.”

“I— I— . . .“ Will’s voice dwindles away, lost as he watches Dr. Lecter’s eyes crinkle around the edges, and Will stares back— stares until his eyes drop towards Dr. Lecter’s mouth and— “Dr. Lecter, you— you have blood on you...”

At that, Dr. Lecter pulls away, somewhat shocked and obviously caught off guard, “Oh, my apologies. I thought I had gotten it all…Do you mind telling me where it is?”

“It’s little above your top lip,” Will says, trying to shake the prey-like feeling that is crawling under his skin, “What happened?”

“A nose bleed while I was preparing things for tonight’s service, I’m afraid,” Dr. Lecter turns away somewhat, pulling a white handkerchief out of the pocket on his black vestments, and he quickly wipes at his skin, “I have a sensitive nose, and this cold weather doesn’t quite agree with it.”

Will suspects that may not be the full reason, but Hugh shouldn’t know any better, “That sounds like it is an uncomfortable problem to deal with.”

“It is,” Dr. Lecter sighs, obviously bothered by the small slip up, “but I manage… I appreciate your sympathy.”

The omega nods, waiting a moment before he lightly clears his throat, “So, um, about the cabin situation…”

The corner of the handkerchief is spotted with crimson now, and as Dr. Lecter pulls it back, Will stares at it— almost transfixed, “Ah, yes. I apologize for the interruption in our conversation,” the alpha pauses for a moment, noticing how Will is observing the rag— he coughs sharply, folding it half-heartedly before stashing it away in his pocket, knocking Will out of his slight trance with it, “But I do stand by my decision to relocate you, Hugh. Dr. Elden even agrees with my judgement.”

The omega sighs, “Then can I talk to him? Work out the issue between us?”

“Hugh, Dr. Elden has already stated to me that he is fine with the new arrangements and would prefer if we followed through on them. The verdict is final,” Dr. Lecter’s tone gets somewhat short— sharp, he’s obviously not going to budge on this, and it makes Will slightly frustrated that he’s losing the only lead he’s gotten— but he nods, accepting it, “Now that everything is settled, I’d like to show you where you’ll be staying until you’re able to return to the city.”

With some amount of resolve, Will sighs and nods.

Dr. Lecter is unusually quiet as he gets his coat over his shoulders, but he does shoot Will a few looks as he readies himself.

“Are you ready to head outside?” Dr. Lecter asks, walking over to the double door and placing his hand on the knob.

“I suppose I am.”

Without much hesitancy, Dr. Lecter opens the doors. Some snow manages to blow in as they are exiting, but Dr. Lecter makes sure that he closes the door as quickly as possible. Once it’s shut, he turns to Will, offering his arm.

“May I?”

Will doesn’t respond, but rather offers up his own to hook around Dr. Lecter’s.

The alpha smiles and loops them together, his chin somewhat uplifted as he begins to guide himself and Will away from the church.

“So,” he starts as soon as they’re off of the steps, “I see that you met Elise.”

“Yes. She helped me find my way to the church when I started to get lost.”

Dr. Lecter smiles, “I’m glad that she was there to help you.”

Will nods, trying to maneuver his way through the deep snow, holding onto Dr. Lecter more than he’d like to keep his balance, “Yes… She’s very nice.”

“A kind young girl, yes,” Dr. Lecter pauses for a moment, and Will glances over, seeing the soft frown he’s sporting.

Against some of his better judgement, Will asks, “Is something going on with her?”

Dr. Lecter is thrown by Will’s question, and he turns his head to the omega, “Why do you ask?”

“She— she seemed upset. At least, that’s what I gathered,” Will remembers her laughing, her somewhat bitter words, “I asked her if she was okay and I didn’t get a straight answer.”

The alpha sighs in understanding, “Elise *is* troubled, I’m afraid. There is a lot going on in her life, much more than what a normal teenager deals with,” at that, Dr. Lecter’s frown grows, “You’ll find that it is better to offer her blind support than it is to ask her what’s wrong.”

“That doesn’t sound quite helpful,” Will argues.

“It is because there is no help that you could offer,” Dr. Lecter clarifies, and Will is taken aback by that, “What Elise is going through is something you cannot change— is something she cannot change. While I do admire your concern for her, Hugh, sometimes there are people you cannot help.”

Before Will can ask what Dr. Lecter means in terms of Elise, they come upon a cabin somewhat similar to Dr. Elden's. It's a little smaller, but it looks quaint from what Will can tell.

"Here is where you'll be staying from now on," Dr. Lecter then lets go of Will, walking up to the door and grabbing a key from his pocket to get them inside, "There's only one key, which I'm entrusting you with, so privacy issues should not be an issue like last time. Also, this cabin is more fitted for living purposes, and unlike Dr. Elden's cabin, it acquires appliances such as a generator and a fridge. I've asked for numerous perishables and other extra necessities like towels and hygienic products to be delivered to you sometime tomorrow once it is all gathered up and appropriated."

"Thank you," Will comes up to stand beside Dr. Lecter just as he opens the door, "I— to be honest, I wasn't expecting something so— . . . fancy."

"Dr. Elden's cabin is rather outdated in some ways, but the man prefers it. However, I would not wish for you to stay for too long in such a place when you are our guest," Dr. Lecter pushes the door back, allowing Will a view into the inside, "Please, make yourself at home."

The omega doesn't miss the way Dr. Lecter seems a little pleased with his specific phrasing, and it makes the little hairs on the back of Will's neck stand on end as he is passing the alpha on his way in, grabbing the key quickly as it is out held for him.

Unlike Dr. Elden's cabin, the one Will has been relocated to is much more— livable. It doesn't feel as much like a storage shed now, but rather like a small retreat. There's a small bed nestled alongside the wall with a trunk settled at the end of it, and a nightstand at its side. The corner near the foot of it is occupied by a small, high-grade furnace that could easily help heat the whole cabin. As Will turns his head, he notices that on the opposite wall, there is a small, built-in kitchen-like area. It includes a small range, a mini fridge, and some counters — one having a sink built in — and cabinets. The kitchen is cut short, however, by a wall. When Will's eyes follow it, he sees a cracked door, and from the limited view that he has, Will can see a small shower and toilet inside. Thankfully, from what Will can tell after his observation, there's only one window right along the wall where his bed is, but it's boarded up right now because of the blizzard.

"For a church retreat, this is very homey," Will comments, his breath condensing into clouds in the cooled space, and he turns to see Dr. Lecter waiting patiently by the doorway.

"I wanted to make sure that you were comfortable for the unknown duration of your stay," Dr. Lecter grins, and he begins to head to the door, "I wish I could stay longer, but there a few loose ends I must tie up before the service tonight. And do not worry, Hugh, I shall send someone to fetch your things from Dr. Elden's cabin, so there is no need to go wondering out."

A sour feeling washes over Will, "Am I not to leave?"

"I would prefer if you wouldn't until the blizzard subsides, and you learn your way around, but who's to say I am to stop you?" Dr. Lecter sounds sincere, making Will slightly

reconsider his words, “Hugh, I am merely concerned for your safety, is all. Please think of me as higher than that.”

“I didn’t mean it in that way,” the omega slightly grumbles.

“It is alright, Hugh,” Dr. Lecter tugs on his coat collar, making it cover more of his neck as he steps halfway out of the threshold, “but there is something I’d like to know before I leave.”

Will’s brows furrow, “What is it?”

“Will you be at the service tonight?” Dr. Lecter then adds, “Of course, I’d understand if you were still feeling sick—“

“I’ll be there,” Will interrupts.

Normally, Dr. Lecter must reprimand for such a rude disruption, but with Will, he beams, looking highly content with Will’s answer, “Good. Very good. Then I’ll send someone by to ensure that you can make it just fine.”

“I appreciate that.”

Dr. Lecter nods Will’s way, pulling at the door as he goes, “Till tonight, then, Hugh.”

Will waits until Dr. Lecter has shut the door to let his face fall, his mood definitely tainted by the failure of his negotiation with the man. It’s another few moments of waiting before he goes to the door, locking it quickly and letting out a deep breath. He settles his forehead against the wood, breathing in haggardly, his shoulders falling.

Dr. Elden was probably one of the only faucets of information Will could’ve gotten here, and the man and Dr. Lecter have efficiently cut off the source. There’s not much of a bitter taste than defeat, and with some resignation, he turns towards his bed, flopping onto it and running a hand half-heartedly through his hair.

Despite his frustration, there’s nothing he can truly do. He doesn’t want to push the issue, because in turn, he doesn’t want to push Dr. Lecter too far with pestering him to reconsider. The decision that the alpha came to will have to be one he’ll just have to deal with, whether he likes it or not.

With a sigh, Will puts his face into his hands, because everything just became a whole lot more complicated than he would’ve liked.

-X-

By the time that someone comes to Will’s door, hours have passed. The omega has spent the time busying himself by exploring his cabin and getting familiarized. He’s found sheets and a blanket in the trunk, and knows that, unlike Dr. Elden’s cabin, his water is heated now—which, is truthfully a blessing, because he knows he needs to bathe as soon as towels and shampoo are provided to him.

Still, there's a rapt knocking at his door, and Will rushes to answer it. When he pulls the door back, Elise is standing on the porch, dressed in red with her coat and her beanie matching exactly. She's smiling, making Will's heart ache a little with its slight familiarity.

"Dr. Lecter sent me to fetch you and give you this," she extends her arm, holding out Will's bag to him, "He said the rest should be coming by in the morning."

"Oh, thank you," Will takes his bag and quickly sets it on his bed.

Elise nods in acknowledgment before she grins, "So, this is your first service tonight?"

"Uh, yes... It is," Will pivots with a confused expression contorting his features, "Why do you ask?"

"Because you're in for a surprise. Here, we don't do things like— like *most* people do."

That catches Will's attention, "Really?"

"Yeah. You see, the pastor is into omnism— which, if you didn't know, is believing or combining different religions. He believes in this unusual combination of Lithuanian Paganism and Roman Catholicism that I never knew could exist," Elise looks unimpressed by it, and Will almost smirks at the unsaid opinion she clearly has on the matter, "I just thought I'd give you a heads up because it's— it's quite *different.*"

"Dr. Lecter mentioned it when he gave me a tour of the church yesterday, but I don't have an idea as to how the combination works, exactly…"

"You'll see," Elise looks back older her shoulder, "My advice is to take it in the first night, see how it works. The pastor won't mind you not participating, since you're unaware of the customs and ways here. Just sit in the back and take it all in, that's your best bet."

Will's nods, "Thank you for the survivalist guide."

"Yeah, you're welcome, old man," she bumps into his shoulder with a small smirk, "Now come on, we don't want to keep anyone waiting."

"Right…" Will murmurs, and he makes sure that his key is on his person before he shuts the door and they're off.

Much like yesterday night, Will can hear everyone from outside as he and Elise approach. He makes sure to take a deep breath, though, knowing that tonight he'll finally be a witness to whatever Dr. Lecter does during a service. He is both equally parts determined and nervous.

"Hey, just do as I said and you'll be fine," Elise whispers to him encouragingly, and she opens the doors to the church, "I would stay with you if I could, but I don't think my parents or the pastor would appreciate me being uninvolved— special guest or not."

The omega exhales deeply, nodding as the doors pull apart. Without the wood in the way, the conversations burst forth with clarity as he and Elise enter. Her grip on Will tightens for a

moment in reassurance before she lets go, leaving Will by himself as the doors swing shut behind him.

However, before Will can busy himself or even move, three people — two men and one woman — approach him, nothing but smiles as they near him.

“You made it tonight!” a woman with auburn hair and a toothy grin speaks, “We were worried you were still ill!”

“Oh, I’m doing much better now,” Will tries to smile at them companionably, but he feels a little overwhelmed at the people who have suddenly surrounded him.

The middle-aged man beside the auburn haired woman speaks, his arm gently placing itself on her waist, “That’s terrific! We’re glad to know that our prayers worked, and you are in better health. It just goes to show that the Lord listens!”

With a hum, Will nods, “Um, yes… I guess He does.”

“Oh, how silly of us— we’ve forgotten to introduce ourselves,” the auburn haired woman looks over to the man who’s holding her waist, “This is my husband, Joshua,” she then looks to Will as her husband extends his hand alongside hers, “and I’m Molly.”

Will shakes their hands, “It’s nice to meet you both.”

“Yes, well, we wanted to come see how you were doing and all. We were wondering how you were holding up since the other night,” Molly smiles, and then she looks over to the other man beside her and her husband, and she lightly taps on his arm.

The other man besides Joshua smiles, his arms tucked behind his back until he allows one hand to appear before him, held out for yet another polite handshake, “I’m Abel Gideon,” Will shakes his hand, not missing the way Gideon’s eyes crinkle just a little too much, or the way his grip tightens ever so slightly on Will’s hand before he lets go, it disappearing behind his back once more, “The three of us are the ones that rescued you the night that you got lost in the woods.”

“Oh,” Will takes a moment, blinking in surprise before realizing that these people had genuinely saved his life that night, “I— I can’t ever thank you enough. I thought I was going to die out there before I found anyone.”

“You must’ve had a guardian angel looking out for you that night, then,” Molly smiles, her hand intertwining faithfully with her husband’s as they share a fond, almost knowing look.

Gideon eyes the couple as Will does, but turns his attention back to the omega before the two stop their moment, “They’re still lovebirds even now, aren’t they?”

Will looks at the two, seeing the unmeasurable amount of love that they have for one another, as though the world around them — that Gideon and Will — simply doesn’t exist when they are in the presence of the other, “Apparently so.”

“It can make for poor company, unfortunately,” Gideon then comes closer to Will until they are practically parallel from one another, “Service does not start for a few minutes. Would you object to spending that time together?”

It’s then that Will can scent him over the nearly overwhelming smell of burning candles and wood— Gideon is yet another alpha. It surprises Will a bit, but also doesn’t, truthfully. Gideon seems that, just like Dr. Lecter, he’s prideful and holds himself superior in that regard. However, he’s older than Dr. Lecter going by the more pronounced graying of his hair, and slightly heavier as Will notices the roundness of his middle that his tailored suit faintly hides. He can tell now that, while Gideon is just as egotistical about his sex, he is not as refined and impeccable in terms of his appearance as Dr. Lecter tends to be.

As for Will, he supposes that he is just a pretty piece of eye candy that smells just as sweet as he looks. It would figure that this were to happen often during his assignment.

He might as well take advantage of it.

“I would not object, no,” Will gently quirks the corner of his mouth and looks away from Gideon, finding some relief that he doesn’t have to look at the older alpha, “I’ve already been given a tour of the church by Dr. Lecter,” Will says, and he tries not to react to the quiet growl that Gideon tries to hide under his breath at the reminder of the other alpha, “so I don’t have any suggestions as to how we would spend our time together.”

Despite his earlier upset, Gideon grins at that, his teeth slightly yellowed and off-putting when Will looks back at him, “We could talk about ourselves. Get to know one another, if you’d like. I can promise that you’ll come to find that I am quite an intriguing alpha.”

Acid tickles the back of Will’s throat as he forces his lips to stretch in a mock of friendliness, “Is that so?”

“Why yes it is,” Gideon says gloatingly, and he holds onto the lapel of his suit in a way that speaks with a bloated sense of arrogance that Will can already tell he distastes, “I’m one of the two alphas here, believe it or not. Everyone else is a beta, but you, of course,” ah, so Will’s the odd one out, the only omega— then, as Gideon chortles, he almost wishes that weren’t the case here, but he feels like it would be conceited and highly inconsiderate of himself to even simply desire that another omega would suffer through Gideon’s poor attempts at flirting by bragging about himself, “Truthfully, I’m probably one of the few people here you could enjoy yourself with. Betas don’t tend to understand omegas as well as alphas do.”

“I see,” Will comments idly, noticing then that Dr. Lecter has entered the room and is nearing the pulpit, and that everyone else in the room is now starting to move to seat themselves, “This was quite the intriguing conversation, but I’m afraid we’ll have to finish it later.”

“Excuse me?”

Gideon seems almost insulted then, but Will simply sighs and gestures obviously around them, “The service is starting now.”

Gideon sees for himself what Will is saying, and with a disappointed look, he deflates from his slight outburst, “Oh, I— we’ll finish this later then, yes.”

The omega sends him a curt nod, but specifically does not bid him goodbye. Rather, he takes a seat in one of the back pews, looking on while the others settle themselves. Dr. Lecter waits patiently for everything to put itself into order, quirking a brow as the last straggler rushes to appropriate themselves. It’s Gideon, actually, that is the last to take his seat, and Dr. Lecter eyes him carefully until he regards the room. His chin is tilted somewhat with pride as he makes the rounds, right until his gaze falls onto Will.

Will watches Dr. Lecter’s lips stretch ever so slightly, and he barely nods at Will before breaking the eye contact they have and speaking out to everyone.

“Blood is thicker than water,” Dr. Lecter starts, his voice echoing among the rafters — strong, sure — he regards about the room to everyone except Will in a few seconds, his gaze as steady as his words, “Many of you are familiar with this phrase. To you, it means family. It means that familial bonds are something more than the other relationships you forge within your time on this earth.”

Coincidentally, Will notices how Molly and Joshua smile at each other, holding hands and giving off a sense of adoration that is almost choking, even to Will. Beside them is Elise; however, she does not acknowledge the couple as Will does. Instead, she almost looks sad when she sees them, like she’s missing out on something important and can’t quite stomach her lack.

But then, Dr. Lecter is talking once more, and Will is snapped out of his observations in lieu of listening to the alpha standing so tall at the pulpit, “—is worth more. The true proverb that you are referencing is that ‘the blood of the covenant is thicker than the water of the womb,’ meaning that the relationships you construct with others are more influential than the ones you are given at birth.”

At that Josh and Molly look a little confused. They seem as though they weren’t expecting this turnaround in the sermon, and are whispering to each other, brows pinched with their brief exchange. When they cease their chatter, they look as though they want to argue with Dr. Lecter— or, at least, “correct” him.

They must have strong family values, Will supposes.

“I myself have never had a family, in truth,” Dr. Lecter admits, and Will wonders if that’s why Dr. Lecter is the way that he is, if that’s why Will is here doing undercover work for the FBI— it’s almost too poor of a reason; but rather, as Will thinks, it’s an excuse, “I grew up in Lithuania while it was under control of the Soviet Union in the early to mid-seventies, hidden away in some of the outskirts of the country. My parents hoped that our seclusion would keep us safe from the horrors that the Union was producing at the time… They were wrong,” Will tilts his head in thought, trying to picture what Dr. Lecter’s troubled childhood might’ve been like— specifically, when as a child, he woke up to the harsher, more adult version of the real world, “In the end, looters found us. A combination of the maltreatment from the Union itself to a harsh winter had made them desperate, almost feral. Without so much of a forethought,

they attacked my home— my family… I found that the fragile piece of paradise was broken — my safe haven violated. My life, ruined…"

To his surprise, Will finds himself virtually feeling sorry for Lecter, because he knows the feeling of losing what little that you had.

Maybe he doesn't have to use his empathy that much at all to get an idea of the man…

"Out of ten or so people, I was the only one who managed to escape," Dr. Lecter's voice falters almost imperceptibly, but Will barely catches it— just who exactly did he lose that would make him ache, even now? "I found that I was an orphan. One of many. There weren't many places to go. There weren't many people that cared. Silence and struggle were my only companions for some time, before I got my miracle."

A litany of hushed murmurings break out among everyone, and Dr. Lecter's mouth quirks ever so slightly in the corner. Will is guessing that the man is liking the attention— the gossip. It's almost as though this is a dinner party he's hosting rather than a sermon.

He waits until everyone is quiet to continue.

"I managed to find my blood uncle years after the looters attacked my family. He offered me a place to sleep, food to eat. But even so, he was a harsh man. He was often laconic, but every syllable he uttered was sharper than any knife. He held onto patience as though it were made of hot coals," ah, so it was a strict household— dare Will think of it as possibly abusive from Dr. Lecter's description, "My uncle taught me that, while blood gives you relation, it does not intend for any relationship to be amorous. It was not until I was older, when I left my uncle and Lithuania for the States for a higher education, that I learned that it is the bonds that you chose that are far more rewarding, that the blood I had sacrificed for my friends was far more worthy than what I had spilt for those who shared it with me. In John 15:13, it is said," then, with a smile, Dr. Lecter looks directly at Will and concludes, "'No greater love hath man, than to lay down his life for a friend.'"

Will is unsure why Dr. Lecter chose to, with the quote in particular, to acknowledge him. Truthfully, the omega doesn't feel too optimistic over it, knowing that the quote and its meaning will most likely come back to haunt him.

He's too busy fretting over Dr. Lecter's words, that he misses part of whatever he started saying, "—for tonight. Please, join me now as we end our Eucharist with Communion."

Will watches as everyone stands, and he follows suit. For growing up in Louisiana, Will had never gone to a church— even one that didn't cover for a cult. He doesn't know what's going on.

It's almost as though he's an obtuse lamb, herding blindly with everyone else as they begin to line up on the right side of the chapel, with Will being the last in line. Are they leaving? Are they thanking Dr. Lecter for his service before they leave?

Before Will can think about too much, there's someone bumping into his side.

“Oh, sorry—“

“Hugh, I *meant* to bump into you. You don’t have to apologize to me,” oh, it’s Elise, “Look, right now I bet you’re wondering what exactly is going on. Well, this is communion— specifically the part in which we drink and eat the consecrated elements, or the wine and the bread.”

Will peaks as he sees Dr. Lecter grabbing a goblet and bowl from the spaces in the pulpit, “Is that why everyone is lined up right now?”

“Yes. But Hugh, don’t drink the wine or eat the bread, okay?”

That instantly sets Will on edge, and he looks at Elise with concern, “Why?”

“I told you, you don’t have to participate tonight. You don’t have to drink or eat anything.”

Yet feels as though it were unstated, but Will decides to focus on the amount of relief he feels instead, “So I can just sit down?”

Elise’s eyes grow wide, and the man in front of Will has apparently overhead, and looks back at him somewhat angrily. Elise waves at the guy, trying to mollify him.

“Sorry, he’s new,” she explains with a cheery but anxious tone, and the man looks at Will once more before facing forward again— beside Will, Elise lets out a rough exhale before she turns her attention onto the omega, her voice now a heated, scolding whisper, “Hugh, you just can’t get up and in line for communion only to sit down! That’s highly disrespectful!”

Will pales at that, and he doesn’t want to know how close he was to most likely screwing the pooch, “I— I’m sorry… I didn’t know. I’ve never been to a service before.”

“*Jesus,*” she hisses under her breath, and the man somewhat glares over his shoulder at Elise, making her add, “our Lord and Savior, Amen,” the guy nods to himself, and Elise then looks at Will, obviously already worn by their discourse, “You mean to tell me that you’ve never been to *any* service before?”

The omega simply shakes his head.

“*You should have told me,*” she sighs, and then looks over to somewhere in the line, “Okay, just— listen to me real quick, because I can’t stay for too long back here with you. But, when you get up to Dr. Lecter and you’re about to receive communion, just do this—“ Elise then crosses her arms over her chest, her upper limbs forming an ‘X’ from her elbows to her hands, “—it means that you do not wish to receive communion, but rather, a blessing. It’ll be more polite than if you walked back to your seat, and you won’t have to do what the pastor said you could be excused from tonight.”

“Okay, so just do this?” Will crosses his arms the way Elise did.

“Yes, do that and the pastor won’t give you the bread or wine,” Elise takes one more glance at the line before she turns her attention back on the omega, “Alright, I’ve got to go and get

back in my spot. Just remember what to do and you'll be fine!" and instantly, she starts to leave.

Will is about to let her go when he remembers, "Oh, Elise!"

She turns, sighing, "Yes, Hugh?"

"Have you seen Dr. Elden tonight? I haven't caught sight of him…"

"No, I don't think he's here," she admits, but then motions towards the rest of the line, "I really have to go, but just do what I showed you and you won't have to worry about anything other than sitting down!" she assures quickly, and then rushes off to wherever she needs to be.

So Dr. Elden decided to skip out on the service tonight… Maybe he's afraid of confrontation from Will…

Either way, Will can't linger on it too much, as the first person — a man, dark-haired and pale — stands in front of Dr. Lecter and the pulpit. He gets offered the bread first, and he opens his mouth to receive it. To some of Will's surprise, Dr. Lecter actually *places* the bread in the man's mouth himself, smiling down at him and then picking up the goblet. Dr. Lecter places it up to the man's lips, and he takes a sip. At the end, the man bows respectfully at Dr. Lecter, and then continues on until he makes his way back to his seat in the very first pew at the front.

This process continues, and slowly but surely, the line shortens as each member of it receives the communication. Will watches as even Elise, who took her spot in line behind Molly and Joshua, passes on through. Afterwards, though, Will just moves on autopilot.

He thinks about Jack, and what he'd think about what's going on. He'd probably keep telling Will that he needs to work faster, worm his way in more efficiently. He shouldn't be spending his time befriending a teenager with an attitude, and that he'd most likely encourage Will to use the attraction from Gideon and Dr. Lecter to his ultimate advantage. In fact, he probably wouldn't throw any type of sexual relations off the table either.

But that's always where Will is different from his superior. While Jack would do anything — truly anything — to get the job done, Will has his limits. And as he notices Gideon from the corner of his eye, ogling at the omega hungrily from his seat, he's reminded that sometimes, you have to consider your options. You need to weigh in every possibility, use the lesser tactics to your advantage because the risk can be too great otherwise. Play the cards that you know will work, and don't try and get yourself killed— that's how Will does it.

And as Will finally makes it to the pulpit, Dr. Lecter grinning almost devilishly at the omega from his higher angle, he realizes then exactly what he must do.

Instead of crossing his arms as Elise had shown him, he makes a small scene, appearing confused and flustered as he approaches.

Dr. Lecter looks pleased with this, and he leans down some, whispering, “Do you wish to receive communion, Hugh?”

Play the cards that you know will work.

“Y-Yes?” it says it with a slightly questioning tone, as though he’s not sure what he’s doing when he’s made his decision already.

“Hugh, there’s nothing wrong with receiving communion. All you simply have to do is drink, and eat,” Dr. Lecter’s smile furthers at the corners as he looms over Will, “I’ll ask again, do you wish to receive communion, Hugh?”

This time, with more resolve in his voice, Will answers, “*Yes.*”

Dr. Lecter nods, and Will looks directly into the alpha’s eyes. He knows that this is not a moment including the church— that this is not an exercise of faith. He knows that this, for Dr. Lecter, is personal, almost like a gift. Everyone else here pales in comparison, and Will is the only thing that the alpha is so inherently focused on at this moment, eagerly awaiting Will’s compliance.

So Will opens his mouth slowly, his lips parting almost sinfully as he does so. His eyes are hooded, never breaking away from Dr. Lecter’s as he readies himself to receive the bread. The alpha is obviously enjoying the sight, of Will lowered before him, mouth open and ready to just *take* what he is given.

Dr. Lecter extends his hand, the bread held carefully between his fingertips. Will eventually leans forward, his tongue stretching ever so slightly to take the bread as though Hugh weren’t too sure of the formalities, and that his inexperience causes his tongue to brush Dr. Lecter’s fingers in a way that would seem accidental to anyone. The alpha’s skin tastes of salt and spice and altogether heated in comparison to the blandness that is the communion bread. Even so, the effect is not lost on Dr. Lecter, whose hand is pulled back almost reverently, like he’s still reliving that single moment of proximity and connection, as he semi-consciously reaches for the goblet of wine.

But then, with a pronounced undertone of *want,* Dr. Lecter offers the wine to Will, his grasp purposefully different from the others, forcing Will to bracket Dr. Lecter’s hands with his own to steady the cup. The alpha’s skin is hot against Will’s, his gaze mirroring the heat of their touching. It doesn’t lessen, only grows, as Will lifts the goblet up at the right angle, sipping the savory wine gingerly but also teasing Dr. Lecter with a small viewing of the pale expanse of his stretched throat in the process.

He does not miss the way Dr. Lecter’s eyes dip down greedily for a peak as he swallows.

But then, Will lets the goblet leave his lips, leaving them covered with the redness of the wine staining the plush flesh of his mouth. He lets the tip of his tongue come out, following along the edges of his mouth to supposedly clean himself up. Dr. Lecter’s growl is barely audible then, but Will doesn’t miss it— he just ignores it, feigning ignorance.

“Thank you for participating in communion, Hugh,” Dr. Lecter’s voice is a rumble, husky and deep as Will blinks softly, most likely a spitting image of innocence that Dr. Lecter strongly approves of.

“It was my pleasure,” Will murmurs, smiling every so lightly at the alpha before he turns, walking down the aisle as the others did.

He sure, going by the small cracking of wood near the pulpit he hears, that Dr. Lecter appreciates the view.

The best part, however, is ignoring the way that Gideon stares at him in disbelief as he passes.

-X-

The service ends fairly curtly, with Dr. Lecter excusing himself almost straight afterwards, as he has to “tend to certain duties.” Will knows what the alpha might be doing, but he’d rather not think about it as they file out of the church.

He knows what he’s done, but that doesn’t mean he necessarily *likes* it.

Will ends up waiting by one of the columns near the stairs, his hands in his pockets and his breath getting caught in the wind that comes by. People pass him on the way to their cabins, all huddled up and tired as they leave, their shadows stretching out onto the unmarred expanse of snow as the light from the chapel extends out into the night. At least now the weather is starting to lighten up, as Will can see some of the expanse of the woods before him.

But before Will can get comfortable, he feels someone punch him in the shoulder, making him jolt and shout.

“What—“ he turns, seeing Elise looking at him with an irritated look, “Oh, Elise…Why in the world did you punch me?”

“*Seriously!?”* she knocks into Will once more for good measure, “I told you how you could avoid participating in communion, and you just *ignore* me!?”

Will places his hands out defensively, “*Whoa whoa whoa,* hold on, Elise. I didn’t ignore you, okay? I just— I forgot what I was supposed to do when I got up there. There’s no need to freak out.”

“Yes, but—“ she groans with frustration, and ends up turning away from Will, leaning on the banister that the railing around the church porch offers, her glare settling somewhere out into the world before them both, “Look, Will, you participating in communion tonight… it means something, okay? It’s very significant…”

Well, he wasn’t aware of that, “Oh…Really?”

“*Yes,* it is,” Elise pivots ever so slightly to face Will, her body weight still resting on the banister— the light from the church forms a stark contrast on her face, her eyes barely

narrowed and brows softly pinched, “Will, communion is a reenactment of The Last Supper. It’s meant to be like a commencement almost… Have you— have you ever heard of First Communions?”

Will looks back, recalling one moment from his past, “When I lived in Louisiana, I remember my neighbor, a young girl named Clarice. She kept telling me about how she had to go get a dress for it, but it didn’t end up happening…”

Elise frowns, “Why not?”

“Her parents couldn’t afford it,” Will murmurs, remembering the questionable conditions he grew up in, “We grew up in a rougher part of Louisiana… We didn’t have much, other than each other.”

Elise is quiet then, and then she goes back to leaning over the rail to stare out as everyone goes to their respective cabins, leaving them alone. Will joins her, mirroring her position and looking up to where the moon is hardly visible in the night sky. Silence passes between them for just a little bit longer, until Elise sighs.

“Sometimes, I feel like all I have are my parents,” she murmurs, and Will feels the wind ruffle his hair and try and sneak up the collar of his coat, “I love them, I do, but— sometimes I wish that wasn’t true… Like the pastor said, the bonds you form by choice are stronger than the ones put in place by biology…” she takes a deep breath, and then glances over to Will, “I care about you, Will. I told you, you’re not like the others here. You need to be careful and— and I don’t want to see you make mistakes like you did tonight.”

“With the whole communion thing?”

“Yes,” Elise breathes, her face and voice stern, “Look, you shouldn’t take this lightly. What you did tonight— that’s initiation.”

Will’s heart almost stops, and he looks at Elise, eyes wide, “W-What?”

“Initiation. It’s one of the seven sacraments,” at that, Elise moves off of the banister alongside Will, until their simply standing on the porch— her hand is gesturing then, and she begins pacing, caught up in her explanation, “It’s a part of the Roman Catholic religion. It’s seven acts or ceremonies that point to what is considered sacred. There’s Baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist, Penance, Anointing of the Sick, Holy Orders, and Matrimony. Initiation is considered the beginning of that. Tonight, you started on the sacraments. That— that doesn’t necessarily bode well.”

His nerves begin to fray a little, “In what way?”

“I’m— I’m not exactly sure, but— promise me that when I tell you to do something from now on, you’ll follow through,” her eyes are fixed on Will’s expectantly.

“I— I promise.”

Elise nods, her shoulders relaxing just a little, “Good… So, um, would you like me to walk you back to your cabin?”

With a small smile, Will replies, “Sure.”

-X-

As Will lights a fire in his small furnace, he tries to shake off the feeling he gets from what he had done tonight. He thought— he thought he had played his cards right, but apparently he hadn’t. He should’ve honestly listened to Elise, because now, he might’ve made it worse by trying to get an edge on Dr. Lecter.

Now, the alpha may consider him interested. He may even consider Will as a part of the cult. This could mean leaving will be harder— that he may have to participate and do the very things that Jack would’ve already suggested as a tactic. The images that his sick mind creates makes Will’s stomach protest, his conscious plagued with a demented sense of intrusive imagination.

His own mistake makes him worry— makes him feel sickened as he crawls into his bed to pass out in what he hopes is a dreamless — or nightmare-less — sleep, the sheets soft and condemning all the same as he closes his eyes, drifting into the darkness.

Chapter End Notes

What to expect next:

— Gideon becomes more of an apparent issue for Will.
— Hannibal is not pleased with Gideon becoming more of an apparent issue for Will.
— The blizzard ends, and everyone has to help out with its aftermath (including Will, but Hannibal may coddle him a bit).
— Will bonds with Elise further, and learns who her parents are.
— Hannibal may or may not cook for Will. ~~He will totally cook for Will and he will be floored.~~
— Will meets a few other "retreat" members.
— Will gets to see and visit Hannibal's personal cabin.
— Will learns more about Hannibal's mixture of Roman Catholicism and ~~"Romavu"~~ (I found out through Mhe, or Lulla, that this is not the name for the religion. Opps.) Baltic/Lithuanian Paganism, so yes, some religious history is going to be included— especially Paganism as we haven't seen just how Hannibal ties that in yet, but it is important to this story I promise (I also won't drawl on about it too much either, I don't want to bore you).

That's it for now! Thanks for reading!

I made a playlist for Hannigram on 8tracks! Listen to it here:

http://8tracks.com/cloudsarefluffy/zero-sum-game

Prompt me here at:

http://sunshinexlollipops.tumblr.com/promptask

This was written to:

1. Teardrop — Massive Attack
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BAVUPu7URbc

2. Youth — Daughter
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VEpMj-tqixs

3. Devil's Trill Sonata — Tartini Violin Sonata in G Minor
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=z7rxl5KsPjs

4. Loving You Is a Bloodsport — ultimate trash lord (8tracks Playlist)
http://8tracks.com/ultimate-trash-lord/loving-you-is-a-bloodsport

5. Serial Killer — Lana Del Rey
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xlf9e9PnJZM

Day 3

Chapter Summary

“Tragedy is unkind. She does not care for formalities, whether there is justness in her actions when she strikes. I have found that it is best to move on from what happened, to face the future instead of the past…” Dr. Lecter picks up a spatula, moving the cooking sausage around in the pan and smiling before glancing back over his shoulder again to look at Will, “After all, look at what it has brought me.”

Will inhales sharply, and pointedly looks away.

-x-

Tags about Rape/Non-Con, as well as prostitution of omegas, are related to a side character, not Will and Hannibal. No offense or triggering is intended by this.

Chapter Notes

Alright now! Day three/chapter three is here!

But before I delve into the deets too much, I'd just like to say a quick thank you for all of your vested interest, bookmarks, kudos, and your comments! I've really enjoyed getting to reply and converse about this fic with you all. It's been interesting to see your reactions as Will gets deeper and deeper into the spider's ~~Hannibal's~~ web, and also with your thoughts on the other side characters like Elise and Gideon. It truly makes all of my efforts worth it in the end, and I just wanted to let you know that — even if you've only read this and counted as a hit — I still appreciate you taking the time to read this work! It means a lot!

I'm also sorry that it took so long for me to update. I've been working on my prompts (from Tumblr alone I have 67, no joke) and I got sick a few days after I uploaded chapter two, so I was too out of it to write anything then.

Now that I'm done giving thanks and the reason for my absence, let's get onto the subject of this chapter. . .

-X-

Honestly, I really liked the scene between Will and Hannibal in the very beginning— it was really fun to write and I enjoyed the whole "shush, I cook for you" type feeling of the scene. There is also a lot of discussion about omega rights/sexism that omegas face compared to the other sexes (in this fic, sexes are: alpha, beta, etc.). There is also

mention and a discussion of "prostitution," as well as arranged and forced bondings/matings of omegas in this chapter, as this happened to someone that Hannibal knew. I'm sorry if this causes any issues for you as you read, but I just wanted to give you a heads up, as well as clarification that it is not directly related to Hannibal and Will's interactions.
(However, I should also clarify that, due to the nature of this prompt/story, that may change in the future. You have been warned.)
I would also like to add that it is no way meant to be implicated on Japanese culture. It is purely fiction (as it is ABO), and is not meant to be negatively representative of Japan, or its people. Apologies are extended if it does cause any offense, as that was not my intention when writing that particular part.

During Hannibal's recollection of his uncle and latter years as a child after his family was attacked, it is implied that Hannibal underwent child abuse, as did someone else he knew. I tagged for this just in case.

Also, there was a lot of research put into this chapter — along with the upcoming ones — in terms of what Will is basically going to be researching himself. Now, I in now way tend to be citing anything or making sure it's 100% credible, and my information was gathered through Wikipedia, but please, I did my best in terms of "accuracy." I'm not writing a college paper, now. Still, there is a lot of information centered on Roman Catholicism and Paganism in Lithuania, and while these parts may bore you, I can assure you that there is importance behind what Will is reading/finding about the religions, as it will affect the story line as it progresses. Seriously, everything is not as it seems. I don't mention it for nothing, okay?
*None of the books that Will reads are necessarily real; however, the information is.

Also, a big shout out to Mhe, or Lulla, for all of their advice and information that they are supplying me for this fic! I seriously learned so much about Lithuanian culture and how paganism is practiced there, and I owe it to them for making it as accurate as possible! It was such a huge help, and I appreciate it so much!

Enjoy!~

See the end of the chapter for more notes

Will is standing naked in what feels like a wall-less room, nothing but a floor and ceiling that stretch on in blackness. However, the ground is covered in blood— it's pooling around Will's feet, warming and staining his skin as he stands by his lonesome. All he can smell is a salty rust, permeating his lungs like the way carcinogenic tar does from cigarette smoke.

His bared skin tingles.

His throat burns.

Fingers trace around the back of his neck, careful— gentle like the caress of silk. Will does not face whoever is touching him, but rather stands, looking forward into the pitch black in

front of him, waiting.

She doesn't take long, circling him and coming around. Her eyes are studying him, her lips not downturned. Her neck is not bleeding, but it is still torn, looking like a fatal injury post-mortem. Will is surprised at the change, at the way that she doesn't feel as accusatory as she usually does. This time, Will does not feel judgement— only pity.

She looks sorry almost, as she brings her hands up, cupping Will's neck. Her eyes drift there, and Will can see where tears are welling up in her eyes. She looks heartbroken.

"What's wrong?"

She brings her hands back from Will's neck, her alabaster skin covered in a dark, almost black, crimson. Will's eyes focus on the blood adorning her skin, unable to speak as he realizes that for once, he's the only one bleeding.

With a cautious hand, Will brings his fingers up to his throat, feeling the hot, vicious liquid run over his skin in rivulets. A slight tremble forms in his fingers, and he starts to breathe heavier, running his fingertips over his skin, feeling where it is broken through and dotted with what feels like—

*"**Teeth marks**," he murmurs in an abject sense of horror.*

And then she motions to her sliced throat, rendering her silent as she falls back into the blood, making it splash onto Will, his eyelids closing in reflex as it gets onto his face. And then, nothing.

When he opens his eyes, it's as though the blood as deepened, moving as though it were the ocean and not as a puddle as Will originally thought. Bubbles float to the surface, mottling it and making Will stare as he watches it somewhat settle.

But then, there are ripples. Something— something is moving.

Will follows them as they spread outward, his eyes coming close and closer to himself. He ends up turning around, and comes face to face with Dr. Lecter.

He not too far away, maybe a couple of feet, but he is coming towards Will. Instead of his religious vestments, he is wearing a suit, fancy and immaculate. He exudes culture and refined grace as he approaches, smiling at Will as he finally reaches him.

Dr. Lecter is silent, but his presence speaks for him. His hands wrap themselves around Will's waist, pulling him in like weights, and burning him as though the man were made of fire and not flesh and bone. His eyes are alight with hunger as he looks at Will, his lips parting into a bright smile.

It is only then that the omega realizes that his teeth are bloodied, just like his neck.

"Forever and always," he says, making Will shiver and fall more into the alpha's hold, "You are the only omega I'd ever want… The only omega I'd ever need…"

And one of his hands slip lower, moving around his hip to place itself on his exposed abdomen— his abdomen that is unexpectedly extending out in a way that makes Will want to scream in disgust, especially with what it implies. The alpha presses a kiss to Will's forehead, fond as his hand stretches out over his skin possessively as he barely pulls back.

"The mother to my children," he growls, and he brings his mouth to Will's bloodied neck, licking up the ruby there and chuckling in a way that makes his vocal cords sound as though they were burned out— rough, gritty, "The omega to my alpha… My beautiful mate…"

And without warning, he sinks his teeth in again, grinding them into Will's flesh and making him scream out in agony as Dr. Lecter pulls, making it feel as though he ripped the omega's throat apart as he holds Will in his arms.

Drearily, Will feels Dr. Lecter mouth at him, only to remove himself just barely to look Will in the eyes.

"Sleep dreams, my dear William."

And he drops Will onto the ground, like an afterthought. His shoes still make ripples in the water as Will lies there, blood crashing over him violently — getting in his eyes, his nose, his mouth — as he is left to die by the very alpha who supposedly cared for him.

Like her, Will is lost to the sea of red.

-X-

Will wakes up with a jolt, a scream brewing in his throat. He trembles, sweat rolling down his skin and getting soaked into his shirt. He feels hot— gross, and sheds it, throwing the soiled tee to the floor and breathing roughly as he tosses the covers off of himself as well.

His abdomen, much to his relief, is flat— unchanged, just like the way it was before when he fell asleep. Cautiously, as though to reassure himself, he runs his fingers across his stomach, feeling his light trail of pubic hair, the skin soft but the muscles underneath hard. But there is no pup there, and it makes Will fall back against his mattress, his lungs emptying themselves in a shaky exhale.

Will brings his arm up to his face, covering his eyes as he tries to breathe— to convince himself that, yet again, it was just a dream. Just a nightmare. Dr. Lecter hasn't mated or knocked him up. He's just an unmated omega. An unmated omega who's in the middle of religious cult, as if that's more reassuring in any way.

Will uncovers his eyes and faces the sight of his ceiling, wondering how in the hell he's going to get himself out of this mess.

Well, he needs to listen to Elise for one. Last night's fumble is going to cost him, in what ways, he doesn't know. Part of him *doesn't* want to know, his dream still too fresh for his liking. Still, the way that Dr. Lecter looked at Will as he received communion isn't positively encouraging, but rather, gives Will the knowledge that choosing Dr. Lecter over Gideon to play with might not have been the best idea. But then again, Gideon *did* only want to talk about himself to impress Will, so there wasn't much promise for good intel there anyways…

Nonetheless, Will should've listened to Elise, and in a sense, should've known better. But he didn't. He didn't know that choosing to partake in communion was an initiation of sorts, because he's not familiar with how this religion works.

What was it that Elise said it was a mixture of? . . . Roman Catholicism and Paganism from Lithuania?

Looks like Will's got to do some research…

But before he can truly get a game plan together, there's a knocking at his door, making him jump.

The door muffles the visitor's voice, "Hugh? Are you awake?"

Oh— it's Dr. Lecter. Internally, Will groans, rushing to the trunk at the foot of the bed and grabbing out clean clothes, pulling his dirty ones off in the process.

"Just— just getting ready!" he shouts in reply, "You caught me getting ready!"

Dr. Lecter chuckles lightly as Will manages to get clean boxers on, "My timing is always imposing, isn't it?"

"Apparently so," Will huffs, and he gets some pajama pants on as he makes sure to grab a shirt, "Almost done, Dr. Lecter."

"There's no rush, Hugh. I can wait a couple of moments."

Will doesn't keep him waiting too long, not trying to test the alpha, especially with his mishap last night. He manages to get the dirty clothes of his into a pile by the bed, and is pulling his clean shirt over his head as he makes his way to the door.

When Will pulls the door back, Dr. Lecter is smiling, his arms full of paper bags, "Hello, Hugh. May I come in?"

Will stands back and gestures for the alpha to enter, and he looks on curiously, "So what're the bags for?"

"Groceries and other necessities," Dr. Lecter says simply, and after he takes his coat off, he beings placing the bags onto one of the counters, starting to empty them and placing a few cans to the side, "John managed to set aside some of our perishables for you while you stay with us. I just thought I'd come by and deliver them myself, see how your first night in your space has gone…"

“It went swell,” Will says without thinking, but then remembers the swell that plagued him in his dream, and it makes him clear his throat somewhat awkwardly as he tries to keep himself on track, “Anyways, um, thank you for the food… It was very kind of you to spare some for me.”

Dr. Lecter smiles at Will over his shoulder for a split second, “Nonsense, Hugh. You don’t have to thank me for being a decent host… Now,” he turns with a carton of eggs and what looks like some meat, “would you like some breakfast?”

“Um… Sure...” Will then regards the meat, “Sausage?”

“Yes, it’s sausage. We have a few fridges and freezers in the storage areas of the church for foods such as this. It’s just that I thought you’d like someone hearty after everything that’s happened… Is that fine?” Will nods, and then Dr. Lecter turns, grabbing some brand new pans out of the cabinets to place them on the range— he turns the dial, flame coming out of the eyes as the gas is ignited, “So, what did you think of the service last night? I’m afraid that I didn’t get the chance to ask you what you thought.”

Will starts to make his bed, swallowing, “It was— nice. I found that I enjoyed myself…”

“I saw that Elise helped you out.”

“Well, yes. I needed some advice,” Will finishes tucking the blanket around the mattress, and then sits, facing Dr. Lecter’s back as he starts to crack open some eggs, their contents getting put into a bowl as the shells are discarded, “I’d never been to church before.”

Dr. Lecter hums as he sets the eggs aside for the moment and opens the sausage, his shoulders bunching together as he flattens it against the cutting board he had gotten out with the pans— Will has to force himself to look somewhere else, “I remember you stating that you were from Louisiana, no?”

“Yes… I’m from there.”

“It’s quite a religious area. Most consider it to be in the supposed ‘Bible belt,’” then, Dr. Lecter opens a drawer and pulls out a knife— the edge sharp and the metal glaring as Will’s eyes widen at its appearance, only to calm only a little as Dr. Lecter begins to slice up the sausage, “Even in such an area, you never went to any services?”

“My father was drunk more than sober. The only time he even got remotely religious is when he complained that he couldn’t buy alcohol on Sundays,” Will murmurs, “I myself never truly found a reason to have faith…”

Dr. Lecter looks at Will then, his brows furrowed, “Why is that?”

Will shifts a little under Dr. Lecter’s gaze, sighing softly, “Didn’t have the reason…” and then Will looks up, changing the subject, “But you do, don’t you? Why do you have faith?”

At that, Dr. Lecter’s air darkens a bit, and he places the sausage into the pan, the meat hissing as it’s cooked, “The misfortunes in my life led me to believe in something bigger. Something

that could me hope when things were at their darkest… My mother taught us both of the religions from the land we lived on, and I found it also suiting to honor her memory to follow in her footsteps."

Will quiets at that, knowing what it feels like to lose a mother, "I'm sorry… about what happened to you."

"Tragedy is unkind. She does not care for formalities, whether there is justness in her actions when she strikes. I have found that it is best to move on from what happened, to face the future instead of the past…" Dr. Lecter picks up a spatula, moving the cooking sausage around in the pan and smiling before glancing back over his shoulder again to look at Will, "After all, look at what it has brought me."

Will inhales sharply, and pointedly looks away.

"So, um, again about last night," he starts, reigning their conversation back in, rubbing the back of his neck as the air begins to fill with the aroma of cooking food, "I met who pulled me from the woods that night… Molly, Joshua, and Gideon."

"Ah," Dr. Lecter pauses for a moment, "What are your thoughts on them?"

"Molly and Joshua have strong beliefs, but an even stronger love for one another, and as for Gideon— . . ." Will trails off for a moment, choosing his words carefully, "I would say he is very apt on letting people get to know him. Only him."

The alpha snorts softly at Will's description, opening a drawer and grabbing a whisk out, "Gideon is quite focused on himself, yes. I hope that he wasn't much of a bore to you while you were waiting last night."

"We didn't get to talk much, thankfully, because the service started around the same moment as our 'conversation,'" Will doesn't miss the quirk of lips that Dr. Lecter has as he begins to whip at the eggs with the whisk, "I wouldn't be surprised if he kept on trying to discuss himself if he had more time."

"If you would prefer, I can ask him to leave you be," Dr. Lecter offers.

Will shakes his head, saying, "No, I— I don't think that's necessary at the moment. It was only for last night that we interacted. He hasn't been a problem, otherwise."

"Well, if he begins to bother or harass you, please, seek me out immediately. I will take it upon myself to repeat to him that you are our guest, and that you deserve respect. You are so much more than just an omega that he believes he can conquer, Hugh, and if he needs to be told that you are a person with choices above all else, as well as that conversations have more than just the subject of one's self, I will not hesitate to explain it all to him for your convenience, and most of all safety."

To his surprise, Will's cheeks heat a little from the tone and sincerity in Dr. Lecter's voice, "I appreciate the gesture…"

"You're welcome, Hugh. I know that Gideon can be abrasive at best. If you can, avoid him as much as possible," the alpha pauses and looks down at the food he is preparing, "Hugh, may I ask you a question?"

"Uh, sure. Shoot."

Dr. Lecter takes a moment to talk, obviously weighing his inquiry, "I— I apologize if this is too intrusive, but— . . . Alphas, do they always treat you like this? Are they always inconsiderate and pressing?"

Will is taken aback by the question, because truthfully, it's not often that people bring it up, because other than omegas, no one else thinks that there's something to talk about.

It goes unsaid, but in society, omegas don't register for much other than their heats and their ability to get pregnant. While other sexes, specifically beta and alpha females, can get pregnant, omegas — especially *male* omegas — are certainly more preferred because of how heats render them "wanton," just begging for a knot and their partner to breed them because of their biological imperatives. Even so, outside of heats, when they are consciously aware and not addled by an onslaught of hormones, omegas aren't valued for much. Work is hard to find, pay is less, discrimination alongside sexual harassment and or assault is common. The only place for omegas in the world, in society's mind, is on a bed with their thighs parted, begging to be fucked.

So yes— there are a lot of alphas like Gideon. They're arrogant, narrow-minded, and only care for socializing with omegas because their ultimate goal is to bed them. Will, in his normal, haggard state, is only seen as an in between — a mere, uninteresting middle ground of being when he isn't in heat. Gideon most likely kept on thinking about his cock in Will's mouth while he talked, rather than truly paying attention to what the omega even said that night.

It happens so often, this erasure. This "evaluation." Will isn't caught off guard by it anymore, having experienced it since he presented at nearly nineteen. He has become acclimated in alphas wanting to take pleasure from his body rather than his mind, has become desensitized to alphas trying to make pleasantries to simply bed him. Hell, even Jack tells him after every other case that he should just settle down, "find the right alpha" and "have kids before it's too late." He is on a timeline, one that is not of his own creation. Rather, it is formed from expectation crossbred with stereotypes, and concluding with a "fairytale" ending that satirizes more of an archetypal Grimm tale denouement.

And so, in a fragile moment of simple admission, Will decides to be frighteningly honest with Dr. Lecter about this one, almost seemingly insignificant thing.

"Yes."

It makes Dr. Lecter look slightly angry, and so he turns, looking at Will with his brows furrowed, "How so?"

"Throughout my life after I presented, I've found that people don't like to think of you as much. They think of you as your identifiers. For me, I'm an unmated male omega, and right

now, a lot of alphas think I'm in the last part of my prime before I'm incapable of having pups," Will takes a deep breath, and then looks down at his lap as though it's at fault for everything, "You know the stereotype of the kid that's always picked last? Like the children have divided themselves into teams, and there's just this one odd kid who's left out in the end, unchosen because no one wanted them in their lineup?"

Dr. Lecter's voice is soft, sympathetic in some ways, "Yes. I am familiar with it."

"I'm that kid, Dr. Lecter. All of the omegas around the world are that kid," Will then looks at Dr. Lecter in the eye, almost in challenge, "We're never good enough for betas or alphas, unless we're the prize for whoever wins."

The alpha pointedly frowns, "Is that how you see it?"

"That's how I *know* it," Will corrects, and he takes a moment to breathe— to calm himself a little, "The world is a really harsh place on its own, but I can also say I'm not fond of people making it pointlessly harder. You wouldn't necessarily understand, though, because you're an alpha. The same people who spit at my feet are the same ones that grovel by their saliva when they see you."

Dr. Lecter doesn't rise like Will might expect him to. Rather, he stays silent for a moment, pensive. Will can tell that the man is thinking about what Will has said, about the way the world is an unforgiving contrast of black and white— that there is no gray medium in between.

And then, he asks, "Hugh, if you were given the chance to change something in the world— to change it for the better, what exactly would you do?"

The question throws Will for a second, and he blinks, answering with, "I would go for equality, of course."

Dr. Lecter nods, as though he makes note of Will's answer as he plates the eggs and sausage, "A wise improvement indeed, Hugh. I agree that the world needs to think more progressively in terms of its treatment of the sexes."

Will raises an incredulous brow at the doctor as he comes around with the plate steaming breakfast, "You say that as though you have a vested interest like I do."

"I *do* believe that omegas deserve better treatment, Hugh," Dr. Lecter scolds softly, making Will reconsider his insolence enough that when Dr. Lecter offers the plate of hot food, Will gingerly takes it with a faintly guilty look, "After all, one of my childhood friends presented as an omega."

The omega grabs a hold of his fork, "Really?"

"Yes," Dr. Lecter takes a second to watch as Will takes a hesitant bite of the breakfast, smiling once he sees the pleasure on Will's face from the taste— he then turns and goes back to the counters, and he starts to clean up after himself, "Her name was Chiyoh. She was a handmaiden to my aunt, Murasaki, when I was still living with my uncle in Lithuania.

Whenever my aunt came over from Japan to visit, we often bonded over the questionable treatments we received under their care."

At that, Will stalls on eating another forkful, "I'm guessing it was always questionable, even before she presented?"

"Yes, it was, unfortunately enough," Hannibal's voice as a solemn, reminiscent tone about it as he fills up the sink with water, "And it was even more unfortunate for Chiyoh, as she presented rather early at the age of fifteen."

"That's— that's almost unheard of…"

It truly is, considering that the average age of presentation is from eighteen to twenty.

"It is what happened to her," Dr. Lecter then submerges the pan he cooked with into the water, the hot metal sizzling and making the water steam up around it, "My aunt thought that it would be appropriate to 'lend' her to willing alphas with spare change until Chiyoh was officially of bonding age, and would then be appropriated to a singular alpha who didn't mind, as she put it, 'gently used goods.'"

Will grimaces at the thought of it, "Isn't that illegal, putting Chiyoh out like that?"

"It was more commonplace back then, and even so it is also a tradition over in Japan. Omegas are given strict policies and regulations that most are forced to comply with… I'm afraid that once she turned seventeen I never saw her again… Last I heard from my aunt a year or two after Chiyoh left, she had been bonded off to some alpha who was a farmer, and was expecting her second child."

"I—" Will takes a deep breath, "That makes what I go through in the states seem like nothing…"

The omega watches as Hannibal takes a washcloth and a bottle of soap out of one of the bags, "Suffering is suffering, Hugh. To regard another's problems as worse disregards your own. Do not belittle your dilemmas to the point at which you think they're unimportant, as then, you will never try to fix anything that may be wrong with your life."

"So 'it could be worse' is basically just going to damn me?"

Dr. Lecter smiles lightly at that, "Yes, I suppose it would."

Will nods and then takes another cautious bite of his eggs and sausage, quickly chewing and swallowing as to not talk with his mouth full, "So, um, Chiyoh," he starts, trying to figure out the best way to word his interrogation, "You never heard from or about her again?"

"No… I left my uncle in Lithuania when I was eighteen, just a few weeks after I myself presented as an alpha. That is when I pursued my education in the States, and never heard from him or my aunt again."

Will nods, pausing, "What is your doctorate for, by the way?"

With a smirk, Dr. Lecter wipes at the pan with the soapy washcloth, “I have a doctorate in psychology. Why do you ask?”

Oh. Oh no. That— that may be a problem… A cult leader who knows how the mind works. Now, isn’t that a terrifying combination?

“Just curious, is all. You just don’t get the title of doctor for nothing,” Will murmurs, and then has a sudden realization, “Which leads me to another question…”

“Yes, Hugh?”

“If you spent so long on a doctorate for psychology, why did you end up in a more theological field?”

Dr. Lecter rinses the pan off, and he sets it on the counter only to pivot to regard Will, his head gently tilted, “That is a good question, Hugh…”

The omega swallows, feeling some unease at his own prodding. Dr. Lecter’s gaze narrows ever so slightly at him, gauging Will. He does this for a few moments before speaking.

“In Lithuania, my uncle was quiet a religious man. Unlike others, he practiced the ethnic religion of our land— paganism. I was exposed to it, and well, I could say that it made quiet the impression… I took some of the traditions from it when I moved to America, and it is then that I encountered the more Christian aspects when I interned at John Hopkins, ironically enough.”

“So is that when you meshed both of them together?”

“It was around the time,” Dr. Lecter stops assessing Will, and begins to put all of the food he brought up, “May I ask why you want to know?”

Red flag. Red flag.

Will is guarded as he speaks, his words calculated, “I’m not— *familiar,* with either of your religions… I just wanted to know how this all came to be.”

“So you want to know more, is that right?”

The omega’s response is wary, “Yes.”

Dr. Lecter then hums in thought as he stocks the minimal space of the cupboards with various canned and boxed goods, as well as the tiny mini fridge, “I suppose that is an innocent request compared to some others… How about this, Hugh, I have some books on both paganism in Lithuania, as well as others on Roman Catholicism. Would you like to read them to get a better understanding of what we practice and believe here?”

So this could be his chance to learn more… How convenient.

“Yes, that would be nice, actually. When can I borrow them?”

“I can’t necessarily lend them out, considering the weather is torture for books currently,” Dr. Lecter shuts a cupboard door then, “I have a room in my cabin that is specialized for keeping them safe in such harsh conditions as the ones we are in. I’m afraid that if you want to read them, you’ll have to pay me a visit.”

Of course there’s a catch, Will thinks somewhat begrudgingly, *And naturally it involves having to directly interact with Dr. Lecter in his cabin, no less…*

“Oh, well… You sure that would be okay?” Will tries, hoping that Dr. Lecter may sense his hesitancy and take it as unwillingness, “I don’t want to be bothersome or anything… I could do without the books if it meant you having your space.”

“Hugh, as I told you before, you are not a burden. I would not mind you being there.”

Okay, so he needs another angle to work at. . .

“Yes, but— . . . It’s your cabin, right? I mean, we just went through all of this trouble because you said that you valued privacy. I don’t want to intrude, is what I’m saying…”

Dr. Lecter smiles softly at Will, “Hugh, I value *your* privacy, that is why we removed you from Dr. Elden’s cabin. Besides, you are not as imposing on me in any way when I invite you to my cabin. That would be rather rude of me, wouldn’t it?”

With some amount of defeat, Will concedes, “Yes… I guess it would be.”

“You can stop by later, if you’d like. My door is always open to you,” Dr. Lecter then begins gathering the empty bags and comes around to face Will, “Are you enjoying your protein scramble?”

“I am… It’s delicious, thank you,” the omega murmurs.

“I am happy to hear that,” Dr. Lecter grins from ear to ear, and then looks at Will’s dirty laundry on the floor, “Do you mind if I take your soiled clothes?”

Will finds that a little alarming, “Why would you?”

“We have a laundry facility here, and I wouldn’t want you running out of what little you already have. It may take a couple of days to get back, as we have to wash in large loads to conserve on our supplies, but I assure that whenever it comes back, it will be clean.”

“I— I guess that’s fine then…”

The alpha promptly leans down and picks the laundry up, folding it over his forearm and smiling at Will once he straightens himself, “I do look forward to seeing you, Hugh.”

“And I you,” Will says, just for formalities.

With a nod, Dr. Lecter heads for the door, and Will watches as he departs.

He ends up eating his eggs and sausage in silence.

-X-

After a few tries at busying himself, Will spends his time lying about the cabin, staring at the ceiling in boredom. Turns out that, despite having his charger and a wall plug, his phone doesn't want to work anymore. He spent some time deconstructing his phone and trying to figure out what happened to it exactly. His best guess right now is that, because of the weather, some snow got into or on it and melted, frying the delicate electronics inside. Despite it being one the bureau gave him for the mission, it still unsettles Will some.

Because, in the off chance, what is he supposed to do when it comes to leaving? Or relaying information? Now, the bureau expects some lapses of silence— he's in the mountains, reception and power are sometimes a luxury he won't be given. But even so, they'll be waiting to hear from in sometime within the future.

Will guesses, with some amount of concern, that he will just have to wait for whenever the bureau decides they'll get answers for themselves.

So now, he's a sitting duck. A bored, sitting duck. A duck that's got nothing to do except be bored and sit and also worry about their wellbeing.

Will runs a hand along his face, breathing in deeply. He's never felt more pathetic in his life, lying on this mattress and feeling sorry for himself. He's a member of the FBI for crying out loud— he should be able to handle this.

He *has* to. For her…

Otherwise, what is he good for?

"Hugh?"

Will startles for a moment— it's Elise.

"Hugh, are you awake?"

Will jumps off of his bed, opening the door just as quickly and practically shocking Elise. She quickly gathers herself, fixing her navy camp back on over her hair and giving Will a look.

"Sorry," he manages.

"Yeah, just— eager much?" Elise sighs out a haggard breath, "Anyways, I just wanted to tell you that the blizzard broke and everyone's gonna be trying to recoup now."

"Oh, that's—" Will looks behind Elise and sees that there is no more snow pelting down onto the poor world below, and already there are others trudging around and working, "Want me to help out?"

Elise smirks, “Lemme guess, nothin’ to do?”

“I’ve honestly been bored out of my mind for the past couple of hours,” Will then grabs his shoes and his jacket by the door, “Care to wait for me while I get ready?”

“Sure.”

It takes Will about five minutes, but after he gets himself fully dressed, he joins Elise out on the porch, looking out to where the snow is piled up high and dauntingly.

“It seems like there’s a lot to do…” Will murmurs.

“Yeah, we definitely need to stock up on supplies like firewood, and start clearing some snow away,” Elise comments, and she begins to descend what should be the steps up to Will’s small cabin, but are instead blobs of white, “I think we’re meeting up with John— another church member that’s sort of like the second hand man around here. He’ll tell us what to do.”

A second hand? Will never would’ve guessed that Dr. Lecter would necessarily allow such a thing— for someone to be considered his equal in any form.

“Okay,” is all he says.

Will observes their arrival carefully, noting the man that everyone is going to for direction. He is a narrow-faced guy, black hair, a slight twitch about him. His scent, from what Will can tell, is beta— is salty, almost anxious-seeming. Even so, the man seems to be taking his role very seriously, clarifying each and every task people must address. When Will and Elise reach him, offering themselves to work, he seems caught off guard— especially when he looks at Will. His eyes go wide, and he takes a moment to even register anything other than Will.

“Uh, John?” Elise ends up spurring him out of his trance-like state, “What would you like us to do?”

“I— I—“ John swallows, averting his eyes away from Will, as though he’s *not allowed* to look, “If you could, help move and store as much firewood as possible. There are a few people already out by the supply cabin who are chopping down what they can…”

Elise nods, “We’re right on it, John.”

John only nods at them, his eyes darting up just a few scant inches, but it’s not enough to even reach Will’s face. He quickly busies himself with the next person that approaches.

Elise wastes no time, grabbing a hold of Will’s hand and pulling him in the direction that they came. Will is a little startled by it, but he follows along, allowing Elise to drag him for a bit until she deems their far enough away. She let’s go of Will’s hand and sighs, fixing her navy beanie and looking towards the snow they’re trudging through.

“Is something wrong, Elise?”

“No, not really. Well, I mean,” she corrects, and then she glances at Will, her expression just a tiny bit vicarious, “Do you know about John?”

“No, I don’t. I didn’t know of him until today… Why do you ask?”

At that, Elise’s lips thin a bit, and she looks ahead with a bit of guilt about her, “Well, it’s just — I could see how he was around you… I should’ve been more considerate of your presence, but, you see, John has paranoid schizophrenia— like, it’s really severe. I think you being there might’ve bothered him.”

“Oh,” Will now understands why Elise has weighted look, “Is that why I haven’t seen him before?”

“Yes. He often spends his time with the pastor or in the church, but at the same time he doesn’t really talk to anyone else or go anywhere. I’ve overheard some people talk about him while we’ve been here. They— they can be cruel about what they say…” and as though it’s a grave, personal admission, Elise murmurs, “I— I feel bad for him.”

At that, Will softens his voice, “Why is that?”

“It’s just that—“ Elise lets out a frustrated breath, “he can’t control what’s going on with him. He just has to *deal* with it. There’s nothing he can do to change what’s happening to him, and others here expect him to somehow magically do it. It’s not fair to him… Just— that’s what I wanted to say about it.”

“Okay,” Will notes how Elise seems to want to change the topic, “So, your parents, how are they?”

Elise looks thankful for Will’s unrelated inquiry, “They’re alright,” she breathes.

“And you?”

With a small, reassured smile, Elise loses the tension in her shoulders.

“I’m gonna be alright too… Thanks, Hugh.”

Will smiles back and pats her shoulder in solidarity.

-X-

They end up working with Molly and Joshua. Turns out that they’re Elise’s parents, and it surprises Will. He honestly never would’ve imagined them all being a family, but yet, there they are. Will is expecting a long conversation, but they’re so busy cutting up the firewood that they don’t take the time to talk as they had last night. Will is fine with that, though. Besides, Will is busy himself with having to carry firewood back and forth between the supply cabin and where it’s getting cut a little ways off into the woods.

He's on his way back, a little ways away from the camp, trekking through the snow with his arms full of at least five logs. Elise isn't with him now, rather she is helping the older couple find proper wood that they can cut.

So it's quite a surprise to hear another set of steps apart from his own.

"Ah, Hugh, how nice to see you!"

It's Gideon, who's smiling wide and in a way that makes Will highly doubt that their meeting is within the realms of serendipity or even coincidence.

"Hello, Gideon," is all Will offers to the alpha, and he continues heading in the direction of the supply cabin.

Gideon follows.

"So, the other night," he starts as he catches up to Will's side, "we didn't get to finish talking, did we?"

"No."

In Will's peripheral, he can see Gideon nod, "Ah, yes— I remember now. The service had started."

"Yes, it had."

"Well, I was wondering if you'd like to continue or conversation? Maybe tonight at my cabin, if you were as interested as you were the other night?"

It's like an instant wake-up call, and Will looks at Gideon — the alpha smirking and acquiring this glint that makes Will's stomach protest in disgust.

"Oh, I—" Will blushes, and then he starts waking faster— the alpha follows yet again, "Look, Gideon, I'm not exactly, well, *interested* in continuing anything."

Gideon laughs with some disbelief edging the noise, "So what you're trying to say is that you were teasing me last night?"

"*Teasing?"* Will shoots Gideon a look right as they reach the supply cabin— after they enter, Will makes a show of his upset as he brashly drops the firewood onto its pile right by the opened door, "I was merely talking with you, Gideon. I was not flirting."

"Then why were you giving me looks? Why were you playing hard to get?"

Will grits his teeth some before speaking, "Just because someone is unresponsive to whatever you consider flirting doesn't mean they're playing hard to get."

Gideon furrows his brows angrily, "But I swear that you—"

“Excuse me,” a familiar, accented voice cuts through Gideon’s complaint like a knife, making Gideon before Will quiet and instantly hang his head, taking one step back as the other takes a step forward— Will is slightly startled to find that the other alpha stops right at his side, “is there a problem here?”

Gideon then looks up at Dr. Lecter, eyes almost a little challenging, “No, not that I know of. Hugh and I were just having a minor disagreement, is all.”

“That is not what I overheard on my way over,” Dr. Lecter’s voice gets an edge to it then— the hairs on the back of Will’s neck stand up at attention, and he notices how Gideon cowers on himself subtly in a reflexive submission, “Gideon, I think I have told you well enough that Hugh is our guest, and that he is to be treated with respect. That does not entitle you to forcing yourself upon him in what you believe is a friendly gesture, especially when he is alone. You are not to bother him in this way whatsoever anymore, do you understand?”

Gideon says nothing.

“*Do you understand?”* Dr. Lecter presses in what sounds like a growl.

“Y-Yes,” Gideon nods, and then takes another step back, “I— I’m sorry…”

“I’m not who you should be apologizing to.”

With a somewhat resentful air, Gideon looks at Will and repeats himself, “I’m sorry…”

“Good. Now leave,” Dr. Lecter bares his teeth a little at Gideon in warning.

With not much protest or hesitancy, Gideon moves past them in a quickened pace, eager to get away from them both. Will has to take a deep breath as he turns, watching as Gideon retreats off into the snow like a lesser man.

“I—“

But before Will can finish what he is saying, Dr. Lecter approaches him, hands cupping Will’s face as his own is scrunched up with an unhidden amount of concern.

“He didn’t hurt you, did he?” Dr. Lecter asks softly with worry, and his eyes dart all about Will’s face, “I was on my way to get some firewood for my cabin, but I only managed to catch the last bit of everything, and—“

“No,” Will murmurs, and he brings his hand up to grab a hold of Dr. Lecter’s right wrist— gently, he guides it down to the alpha’s side, “Gideon didn’t do anything but prove how dense and presumptuous he is.”

Dr. Lecter nods, understanding. It takes him a mere split second more to let his other hand drop from Will’s face, but he does so with resolve. And then, he gathers himself some, trying to appear less worried now that everything is fine.

If Will weren’t aware of everything, he’d almost be flattered.

“I apologize for the way he acted, Hugh. You didn’t not deserve such forward and unwanted advances,” Dr. Lecter looks off in the direction Gideon had fled, as though he was sending his ill will that way in hopes it’d make a difference, “Gideon is an unmannered and obtuse excuse of an alpha. He should’ve known far better than to treat you in such a way.”

Will decides to break his gaze away from Lecter’s face, swallowing and clearing his throat, “Well, he’s gone now, so… it wasn’t that bad.”

“He only left you alone because I interceded,” Dr. Lecter argues, and for once, Will can’t see any flaws in the logic, knowing that Gideon apparently didn’t understand the concept of his lack of attraction, “Hugh, I don’t think working out here where he is will be safe for you. Especially if he’s able to corner you while you are alone as I saw.”

“I understand that worry, but I don’t want to stay in my cabin all day and do nothing, Dr. Lecter. Out here I’m at least busying myself and I’m helping the others.”

“Well, if you are looking for some tasks to complete, you could read those books I have been talking about while we take care of things. Gideon won’t be able to bother you then, and you can make sure that boredom will not be in your company.”

Will considers it for a moment, “What about Elise? I— I came out here with her. I’ve been helping move the firewood.”

“Elise will be fine, Hugh. If it does bother you so much, I will go explain the situation to her and even take your place once you are at least out of danger from Gideon.”

The omega worries his bottom lip for a fraction of a second out of thought before conceding, “O-Okay…”

And Dr. Lecter smiles.

-X-

Dr. Lecter’s cabin is— well, it is not drastically dissimilar than the other cabins, but it is definitely different. His cabin is a tad bit larger, mostly to accompany the books he has there. He does, however, have a similar set up to Will’s— with the kitchen area and the bath being connected to one main room. Will is a little surprised, if he’s honest. He’d be expecting Dr. Lecter to make something for himself be extravagant.

But no. His cabin is rather simplistic, and Will doesn’t find himself overwhelmed by the space. In fact, Will ends up conforming to it rather easily. In the library section, Will finds a small recliner and settles himself in it, enjoying the calmness and reclusiveness that it offers.

“This is my personal library,” Dr. Lecter explains, and sets a cup down on the end table next to Will, steam rising about its lip from the fresh coffee inside of it, “I often come here after services or when I need to unwind.”

“I’ve known very few people who take their pleasures in books,” Will admits, and his eyes follow Dr. Lecter as he goes over to a shelf in particular.

Dr. Lecter chuckles as he grabs two hardbacks from the selection, and he pivots his heads to look at Will, the books held easily in his hands with a relaxed air, “Books give me an outlet that my profession cannot offer. Or, in terms of literary prowess,” Dr. Lecter then begins to head towards Will, and he ends up setting both of the volumes on the end table beside Will’s coffee, “I am a fan of all things exquisite.”

Will blinks, only to avert his eyes from Dr. Lecter in place on turning his attention towards the books— his eyes squint faintly at them, nostalgia creeping its way under his skin, “I used to read a lot when I was younger,” Will starts, “They were like an escape for me.”

“To trade one world for another,” Dr. Lecter muses from off to the side.

“In most ways, yes. I found that what happened within the pages was much more interesting than what was happening in my actual life.”

Dr. Lecter hums, stepping away and picking up a few stray works that had been left around, “I used to feel the same way about writing while I lived with my uncle. I found that it was often kinder than he.”

“So we both prefer imaginary over reality?”

As Dr. Lecter slides his various novels up into their specific placings, he says, “You did say earlier that the world is a harsh place. It is not out of place for us to wish that things could have been different.”

Will nods, and he looks at the books Dr. Lecter selected for him— he outstretches a hand and grabs the first one.

Its cover is a faded green with the remains of intricate detailing in a darker shade of the same color. Will’s fingers run over its embellished letters, a weathered gold imprinting that reads: *The Precursor: A Historically-Based Reconstruction of Baltic Paganism in Lithuania.*

“Sometimes, I would lie to my dad about going to bed, and I would open up the curtains to be able to read,” Will smiles softly, “The moon was my flashlight.”

“You didn’t have one?”

“Too poor. Maybe too impractical,” Will chuffs succinctly, “My father was often too drunk to make sense.”

Dr. Lecter hums, “What about your mother? What was she like?”

Will sighs, and he opens the book to some of the first pages, all credits as he flips through, unhurried, “A stranger. She left before I could even have a memory of her.”

“So in what family we lacked, the one we had was— well, lacking.”

At that, Will snorts quietly, “Yes. I suppose it was, for lack of a better word.”

Dr. Lecter chuckles and walks behind Will, heading out towards the entryway to the space, “I’m afraid that I must go, Hugh. I did assure you that I would help out Elise and the others in your stead.”

“And I thank you for that,” Will muses, but he does not lift his eyes up from the first actual page of information, “If you could, tell Elise that I’m sorry I couldn’t have been of more help.”

“She’ll understand, I’m sure. She has a good head on her shoulders,” Dr. Lecter trails off for a moment, “I’ll see you in some time, Hugh. Enjoy the books.”

Will hums in acknowledgement, now thoroughly reading.

He doesn’t hear Dr. Lecter leave.

-X-

So… Will’s learned a bit about Baltic Paganism, that’s for sure. He’s only in the first chapters or so — which focuses on some of the aspects of its religious figures.

There’s Dievas, who’s considered to be the supreme leader of the gods who is nothing but also everything at once— just all encompassing. He is also apparently is the source of all things that are considered good, from birds to friendship. Dievas also is credited to the creation of humans, which was actually accidental, as they were created from little specs of dirt Dievas washed from his face. And there’s a few others, like Liama, for example. She’s the goddess of fate and the moon, and spins flax that is supposed to represent a human’s life.

Will finds it pretty interesting, truthfully. It’s much different from what he expected.

But now he’s out of the gods and goddesses section, and is in the mythos. He ended his reading at the start of it, yawning and finding his eyes strained and eyelids heavy. He ends up placing the black ribbon that is attached to the inner spine and marks his place. Afterwards he sets the book down and runs a hand down his face.

Just *how long* has he been reading?

The wood in the heater has turned into nothing but heated ash and dying embers, and Will makes sure to at least put and start burning a few logs in it before he leaves. He also makes sure to clean his mug.

When Will starts to leave, he notices that it’s dark out, and that no one is around as he thought they’d be. He ends up trudging back, stumbling a little from how tired he is. Somehow he manages to get to his cabin, and he starts a fire before anything else. It’s only until he’s sure that it’ll last through the night that he quickly starts to throw off his clothes. He

ends up only clad in his tee and his boxers, and he then climbs in his bed, so tired he doesn't even bother to brush his teeth. The bed is so inviting and comfortable when he crawls in it. He settles, sighing and settling into the covers, eyelids slipping closed. His mind already starts to vaguely recall things from the day— the smell of firewood, coffee on his tongue, Dr. Lecter's hands on his face— so careful, so gentle. And so Will falls asleep, slipping into unconsciousness with the faint memory of the alpha on his mind.

Yet, he dreams of nothing.

Chapter End Notes

What to expect next:

— Will revisits Lecter's cabin as well as his library.
— We'll learn about a few other religious figures and even practices within Baltic Paganism.
— Will shall actually have an interaction with Elise and her family. Not all is positive, though Will is not the cause.
— Gideon won't be as forward as he is, but he is still going to be in the background.
— Will has a bit more of an interaction/conversation with John.
— Will begins to discover that a few things are amiss.

That's it for now! Thanks for reading!

I made a playlist for Hannigram on 8tracks! Listen to it here:

http://8tracks.com/cloudsarefluffy/zero-sum-game

Prompt me here at:

http://sunshinexlollipops.tumblr.com/promptask

This was written to:

1. Tempest — kniveau (8tracks Playlist)
http://8tracks.com/kniveau/tempest

2. Never Let Me Go — Florence & the Machine
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zMBTvuUlm98

IMPORTANT UPDATE

Hey guys, it's me, cloudsarefluffy.

I'd just like to clarify that **I did not forget about this story.**

To summarize what happened: I found the amino for one of the bands I like, and I joined it. I got sucked up into it, thought it was something awesome and made a lot of friends, a lot of which are big, influential (sadly) people on the app. I thought I was part of an awesome community, and I was making a difference or an impact of sorts. I spent seven months trying to do whatever I could to feel like I was a part of something with everyone else.

Basically, I had quite the shock of my life when I found out that just wasn't the case.

So yeah, it's quite the eye opener when, because of a blown up disagreement thanks to your "friends" on the moderation team and the situation being shit in general, they'll go as far as making a deceitful, defaming hate post about you that's featured for everyone in the community of over 122,000 people to see.

You know... just cause.

Mentally, it's been shit to have such a thing happen when I already wasn't doing well at all, and I've been trying to move on as best I can.

Coming back here is part of this, as writing is a true coping mechanism for me.

And I missed fic, I really did. I just got so caught up running with people that literally betrayed me so harshly and publicly in the end, and yeah, I'm kind of returning with my tail between my legs for ever having ventured out of the backyard in terms of communities.

So, in short: I'm catching up.

I'm going to try and remember the entirety of the plot, and I need to find my notes (sadly, renovations in my house have relocated practically everything to my name), so I can pick up where it's left off, and in the end, finally finish it.

I'm so sorry that I was gone for so long.

But I'm officially back now, and I plan to finish things.

Again, my sincere apologies for such a long wait.

I hope you guys are still with me.

- *cloudsarefluffy*

Time for a Redo

Chapter Summary

Not relative to the plot, but this a pretty major message involving the story and what is to happen with it.

Apologies for all the confusion and mishaps, but this is something I felt needed to happen.

If you have any feedback, please comment!
I'll try and respond to you as soon as possible.

NOW UPDATED WITH ADDITIONAL INFORMATION.

Last Update: November 16th, 2017.

(For TDLR, main points are bolded.)

Hey, guys!

I just wanted to say that I really hadn't forgotten about this story. In fact, I just re-read my first three chapters to get a feeling for what I was doing again.

And I decided that, after seeing all these typos and other errors and in general things (like characterization and happenings) that I was majorly unsatisfied with, that **I plan on rewriting this story altogether.**

For right now, I sadly cannot do so.

My computer, if you've read on my most recent Sterek story, has been trapped in a technological purgatory due to a botched attempt to update Windows.

I've done what I can, but I have to take it in to get it fixed by someone who can do more than turn it off and back on again in hopes for the best.

So, on my Tumblr, I announced that, **due to technological issues, I am on an indefinite hiatus.**

And before anyone asks, I'm updating you on this via cellphone. Which, trust me, is not ideal for this sort of thing.

But back to the story itself. . .

Either way, I feel like this needs a massive overhaul, as I was not impressed with what I had posted here.

Truth be told, I think it is very poor writing at times (grammar-wise, my descriptions, and with the story itself), Will seems like a weak-minded character who's flip flopping too much for my liking, and also, I can feel the improvisation that my writing had because I barely even had a skeletal plot for this, and nothing more.

So, with that in mind, I'm going to be hitting the drawing board again to make a more succinct plotline that feels far more fleshed out and considered, and I'm definitely going to work on Will's character overall in this.

And of course, when I rewrite this altogether, in hoping that my writing will be better this time, and will have better flow as well.

Despite all that, some of you may not exactly understand why I'm doing this, but I just want to clarify that this story was kind of forced out of me, as I pushed it to be published and written before I was ready, so it could be uploaded for the first Hannigram day.

Because of that, I can tell I just *wasn't* feeling the story here whatsoever in any capacity, and it suffered for it, which isn't fair to you guys.

So, once I am able, expect a completely revamped "Until We Felt," because that is what is to happen.

I'm not sure if I'm going to delete all of this together and just make a new submission for this fic, or if I should just shell it out as best I can, and fill out the husk with the revised version instead.

Maybe you all can tell me what you'd prefer?

And **in general, I'm open to any feedback that you may have, so please, leave a comment if you have any questions or anything else for me!**

I'm hoping this decision for this story overall is going to be for the better, and so if there are some of you who are not happy with this change, I apologize.

This just feels like what I have to do if I want to go forward with this work at all, so please, bear with me.

Even so, thank you all so much!

I appreciate all of you who have stuck around among this confusion and overall lack of happening when it came to this story! You all are very kind, and I grateful for both your patience and your love.

As for the comments on chapter four, I also appreciate the support and kindness I received from you all when I initially updated you on my overall absence. It was such a relief to see all of your comments, and it really helped me heal that much faster to where I could tell you all of this now.

So, in short, **thank you so much for sticking with me and this work, and for giving me support for what happened outside of AO3!**

Your determination and support is nothing but admirable and impressive to me.

Alright! That's it for now!

I'm hoping to respond to any comments as soon as possible, and if I need to add anything to this, I shall.

Until then, thank you!

Hopefully I can fix my laptop soon and get this revamped work out!

- cloudsarefluffy

EDIT: I have a few updates now!

Firstly, after receiving a few comments in relation to my consideration of deleting this version of this story, **I was told that some wanted me to keep this fic up as link to the remake once it is uploaded.**

So, once the remake is made available, this chapter (five) will be deleted, and chapter four will be deleted and reuploaded (to alert those subscribed) with an explanation for those who

are not aware of this major change, and will link those who need it to get to the remake.

Secondly, I've already begun some research! Truthfully, I was unsatisfied with the amount of information I had on Baltic Paganism and other religious factoids, so **another reason I decided to redo this fic was to include additional information on both Baltic Paganism and Roman Catholicism.**

I've garnered some more already, and before I get to plotting, I want to have my resources ready before anything else. It is highly important that I am familiar and knowledgeable about these things, **so that is also why I suspended this version and aim to replace it entirely.**

Thirdly, **thank you all so much for your comments thus far!** They have all been very sweet, understanding, and you have reassured me that this story wasn't bad as I was thinking. I do appreciate your kind words and assurances, but that sadly isn't changing that I am redoing this fic altogether (although I am to keep the plot, I am just restarting to get a better handle on it, so it won't be too different from what was already happening in some ways). But even so, **you all have also been supportive of my desire for this remake, so thank you for that!** I was expecting some negative objection, and it hasn't happened yet, so that's great! Thank you all for being so patient and supportive! **It's greatly appreciated!**

That's it for now! (8/8)

UPDATE (8/14):

Hey, everyone!

Still haven't forgotten about this, I promise. **I actually came here to update everyone with another footnote in the progress I've made recently.**

I've been making a lot of plot adjustments and further characterizations, so I've been working on some more of the finer details as of late. **I also have got my information for this story, my research, more in order**, and I have a better understanding of what I'm going to be doing now (although, I am admittedly still learning the ropes).

Also, I've been considering some things about the timeline and the chapter count. This all occurs in a 22-day period, which isn't changing, but after some consideration, while certain days will get chapters of their own, the others that more sense filler, or less eventful in terms of plot, may be grouped together accordingly. This is to avoid having too many chapters that feel as though nothing is happening, and I feel like it would flow better if I grouped these days where seemingly nothing as serious happens, then the story would benefit as a whole from that decision.

So, as of right now, **I've decided that specific, multiple days, in which less occurs and they are more so filler days, they will be represented in a singular chapter together as we go along**, for the ease of reading and the flow of the story.

This will also help for whenever I upload the story, as **I mentioned that I plan on writing the entire fic and uploading it daily, chapter by chapter**.

This would be an easy way to get the remake out rather quickly, and to make up for all of this confusion, and for how long you have all waited for it in general.

Aside from the story itself, I'm **still working on my computer issue**, which is still not solved entirely.

I'm going to be trying to maybe do some more on my end to fix it, but **money is really tight right now**, and I maybe not be able to foot any bill for repair or service at the current moment, **so the trip the to tech support company I was talking to may be delayed for some time. Not sure how long**.

Otherwise, that's it! Sorry if there isn't much to say, but a lot has been happening that I do have to be vague about so I don't spoil anything.

Until next time!

UPDATE (11/8):

Okay, so I wanted to try and announce this in a more timely or special manner, but I figured something needed to be said before anyone thought I forgot about this story and wasn't going to make good on my promise.

So, there are a few things I need to say: the first is that my computer is fixed.

I posted about it on my Tumblr, but I'm not sure if anyone here on AO3 saw it.

But to summarize: my hard drive had to be wiped. We managed to save my saved files, but the issue was that my Microsoft Office was deleted whenever my hard drive was wiped to reinstall Windows 10. So, despite my computer being up and running for a wee bit, I didn't have Microsoft Word --- ergo, no writing.

I eventually did get Microsoft Office again, but at this point, I was already deep into things like Inktober, and was unable to start writing.

Plus, I got a job in October, so I have been preoccupied with that as well.

Those things aside, the main reason I wanted to update you all was for the fact that I am trying to participate in NaNoWriMo, or "National Novel Writing Month," which takes place through the entirety of November. The goal is to write at least 50,000 words, and lemme tell

you when you're doing things like making art daily, or you are having to work, it was really hard to get a head start, and to keep up.

But mainly, it was hard to even start, because I've found that I'm still being plagued by the ever-dreaded writer's block.

I've been struggling with some of the worst writer's block that I have ever experienced for over a year now. I don't know what it is, but my writing muse has hit the worst slump it's ever been in. And while I get the urge to write, or I attempt to, it leaves things feeling forced, or out of my grasp in terms of actually making it happen a word document.

The reason why I am saying this is that I wanted to try and make "Until We Felt" my NaNoWriMo work, but if anything, this story wasn't working.

I would say that the issue lies with me this time instead of the story. I actually had some really amazing plot twists and ideas for this fic, and I was so excited to start working on it to see what could happen. But the truth is, as soon as I wanted to write this fic, it just... didn't want to come out.

What little I did manage to produce felt off, and I particularly wasn't fond of any of it. There were a lot of times I deleted what little I had written, or just stared at it, wondering whether or not I should make major changes. So I feel like I need maybe some more time working out a few kinks in the story overall, but mainly, for me to grow more comfortable with this, and to try and get back into the swing of writing again.

I'm trying to do that by attempting NaNoWriMo in a rather unconventional way: a 50,000-word goal met by writing multiple, different stories.

I'm aiming to achieve this by filling prompts that have been sitting in my Tumblr inboxes for ages, at this point. So I figured that I could also address one of my bigger issues with my absence in writing on top of trying to get writing to be amicable again.

I wanted to tell you all this in case some may get upset over Tumblr prompts of mine being written instead of "Until We Felt," but the simple matter of the fact is that this story is still giving me issues, and I don't want to put out something that doesn't fit my standards, nor my vision. I am already rewritting this fic, and so I want to make sure that the second attempt is my last.

Other than that, I don't believe there is anything else to update anyone on. I do apologize that this fic is still proving to be problematic for me. But I am trying my best to make it work, and to make it the story that I know it can be.

Thank you all for your love, support, and patience! I appreciate it all so much!

- cloudsarefluffy

UPDATE 11/16:

So, a few things are to be said with this minor update.

I said I was going to try and fill a couple of prompts in lieu of trying to participate in NaNoWriMo with one large work, but the truth is, that isn't working out either. I'm having a lot of personal things going on (military friend being on leave and in town, my car not wanting to start, and I've been trying to put my furniture back into my room from where it was stored in the garage). Also, with Thanksgiving coming up, not only do I have familial things to attend, I'm also working a majority of next week. Including Back Friday.

I've been too pressed for time to really try and attempt a 50,000-word goal, so honestly, my hopes to try and garner that total were dashed very early on into things.

That being said though, there are still a few things I plan on doing.

The first is that I signed up for a Sterek and Hannigram gift/fic exchange. The Sterek one is due soon, and while I started, I need to get my butt in gear because it's due December 10th, and with my social and work schedule, I need to try and get as much done as I can before it's too late.

As for the Hannigram gift exchange, the main Hannigram holiday exchange I signed up for is just... mysteriously inactive? I've checked multiple times, and they haven't posted or changed anything in months. I thought the dates on their page were for this year's schedule, but alas, they were from last year. I don't think they are going to be doing anything for 2017, honestly. So I managed to find one exchange that is up and running for Hannigram/NBC Hannibal, and I signed up for it today.

The second thing that I plan on doing is that I still aim to post a few prompt fills. It's been a while, and I know that my prompt fills have been lacking, as of late. This is because of this writer's block of mine. It really has been the worst to put up with, I'm not gonna lie. So I'm hoping that, with a few prompt fills (or attempts at them), can help dislodge this block, or help me get back into the flow of things. I'm really hoping.

Otherwise--- that's it. That's all I can think of that is pertinent at the moment. Really, the only pressing things right now are the holidays, work, and my muse acting like a jerk.

So, hopefully, I'll have some prompt fills up soon, and sooner rather than later, I can start working on this fic like I've been really wanting to for months!

Again, for the countless time, I do apologize that this is taking me ages. You all are so patient and supportive, and I appreciate it all. It's why I am trying so hard to push through this insane writer's block, even when it's literally kept me from writing for over a year now. You all help give me the drive and inspiration to keep going and persist against it, and for that more than anything, I thank you.

Hopefully my next update will be more positive than this one, but for now, this is what I have to say.

Happy holidays, everyone!

- cloudsarefluffy

End Notes

What to expect next:

— A strange mass in Hannibal's church that Will partakes in.
— Will gets his own space at the retreat.
— Will meeting those that pulled him out of the woods.
— Will also meeting someone at the retreat that reminds him too much of old faces.
— The sinister parts of Hannibal and his cult become more apparent.

That's it for now! Thanks for reading!

Prompt me here at:

http://sunshinexlollipops.tumblr.com/promptask

This was written to:

http://8tracks.com/parchwolf/folie-a-deux

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!